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PAPERS ON INDIAN REFORM.

FOSTER'S ESSAY

ON

DECISION OF CHARACTER:

WITH

SOME REMARKS

ON

MORAL COURAGE.

FIRST EDITION, 3,000 COPIES.

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PREFACE.

A proposed Series of PAPERS ON INDIAN REFORM is fitly commenced by one on *Decision of Character*, as without some measure of this quality any movement of the kind is impossible. Foster's celebrated Essay on the subject seemed well adapted to the purpose in view. It was written in the form of letters, and included in his Essays, published in 1805, which have been remarkably popular in England, especially among the more thoughtful of the community. Sir James Mackintosh says that they showed their author to be "one of the most profound and eloquent writers that England has produced." Another good authority expresses the following opinion: "His thinking is rugged, massive and original; and at times, when his great imagination rouses itself from sleep, a splendour of illustration breaks over his pages that strikes the reader both by its beauty and its suggestiveness."

To assist junior readers, brief summaries have been prefixed to the Letters, and a few brief explanations have been added. Three notes in the original can easily be distinguished.

Some remarks have been appended, showing the need of Moral Courage in India, and the source from which it can be derived. It is on the latter point that Foster's Essay chiefly needs amplification. The sequel consists mainly of a series of extracts from good writers, European and Indian, with some connecting links.

J. MURDOCH.

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ON DECISION OF CHARACTER.*

LETTER I.

[Examples of Want of Decision ; its Evils. Advantages of Decision.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WE have several times talked of this bold quality, and acknowledged its great importance. Without it, a human being, with powers at best but feeble and surrounded by innumerable things tending to perplex, to divert, and to frustrate their operations, is indeed a pitiable atom, the sport of divers and casual impulses. It is a poor and disgraceful thing, not to be able to reply, with some degree of certainty, to the simple questions, What will you be? What will you do?

A little acquaintance with mankind will supply numberless illustrations of the importance of this qualification. You will often see a person anxiously hesitating a long time between different, or opposite determinations, though impatient of the pain of such a state, and ashamed of the debility. A faint impulse of preference alternates toward the one, and toward the other; and the mind, while ~~thus~~ held in a trembling balance, is vexed that it cannot get some new thought, or feeling, or motive; that it has not more sense, more resolution, more of any thing that would save it from envying even the decisive instinct of brutes. It wishes that any circumstance might happen, or any person might appear, that could deliver it from the miserable suspense.

In many instances, when a determination *is* adopted, it is frustrated by this temperament. A man, for example, resolves on a journey to-morrow, which he is not under an absolute necessity to undertake, but the inducements appear, this evening, so strong, that he does not think it possible he can hesitate in the morning. In the morning, however, these inducements have unaccountably lost much of their force. Like the sun that is rising at the same time, they appear dim through a mist; and the sky lowers, or he fancies that it does, and almost wishes to see darker clouds than there actually are; recollections of toils and fatigues ill repaid in past expeditions rise and pass into anticipation; and he lingers, uncertain, till an advanced hour determines the question for him, by the certainty that it is now too late to go.

* The quality of making up one's mind quickly and clearly upon any difficult point.

Perhaps a man has conclusive reasons for wishing to remove to another place of residence. But when he is going to take the first actual step towards executing his purpose, he is met by a new train of ideas, presenting the possible and magnifying the unquestionable disadvantages and uncertainties of a new situation ; awakening the natural reluctance to quit a place to which habit has accommodated his feelings, and which has grown *warm* to him, (if I may so express it,) by his having been in it so long ; giving a new impulse to his affection for the friends whom he must leave ; and so detaining him still lingering, long after his judgment may have dictated to him to be gone.

A man may think of some desirable alteration in his plan of life ; perhaps in the arrangements of his family, or in the mode of his intercourse with society.—Would it be a good thing ? He thinks it would be a good thing. It certainly would be a very good thing. He wishes it were done. He will attempt it *almost* immediately. The following day, he doubts whether it would be quite prudent. Many things are to be considered. May there not be in the change some evil of which he is not aware ? Is this a proper time ? What will people say ?—And thus, though he does not formally renounce his purpose, he shrinks out of it, with an irksome wish that he could be fully satisfied of the propriety of renouncing it. Perhaps he wishes that the thought had never occurred to him, since it has diminished his self-complacency, without promoting his virtue. But next week, his conviction of the wisdom and advantage of such a reform comes ~~again~~ with great force. Then, Is it so practicable as I was at first willing to imagine ? Why not ? Other men have done much greater things ; a resolute mind may brave and accomplish every thing ; difficulty is a stimulus and a triumph to a strong spirit ; “the joys of conquest are the joys of man.” What need I care for people’s opinion ? It shall be done.—He makes the first attempt. But some unexpected obstacle presents itself ; he feels the awkwardness of attempting an unaccustomed manner of acting ; the questions or the ridicule of his friends disconcert him ; his ardour abates and expires. He again begins to question, whether it be wise, whether it be necessary, whether it be possible ; and at last surrenders his purpose to be perhaps resumed when the same feelings return, and to be in the same manner again relinquished.

While animated by some magnanimous sentiments which he has heard or read, or while musing on some great example, a man may conceive the design, and partly sketch the plan, of a generous enterprise ; and his imagination revels in the felicity, to others and himself, that would follow from its accomplishment. The splendid representation always centres in himself as the hero who is to realize it.

In a moment of remitted excitement, a faint whisper from within

may doubtfully ask, Is this more than a dream ; or am I really destined to achieve such an enterprise ? Destined !—and why are not this conviction of its excellence, this conscious duty of performing the noblest things that are possible, and this passionate ardour, enough to constitute a destiny ?—He feels indignant that there should be a failing part of his nature to defraud the nobler, and cast him below the ideal model and the actual examples which he is admiring ; and this feeling assists him to resolve, that he will undertake this enterprise, that he certainly will, though the Alps or the Ocean lie between him and the object. Again, his ardour slackens ; distrustful of himself, he wishes to know how the design would appear to other minds ; and when he speaks of it to his associates, one of them wonders, another laughs, and another frowns. His pride, while with them, attempts a manful defence ; but his resolution gradually crumbles down toward their level ; he becomes in a little while ashamed to entertain a visionary project, which therefore, like a rejected friend, desists from intruding on him or following him, except at lingering distance ; and he subsides, at last, into what he labours to believe a man too rational for the schemes of ill-calculating enthusiasm. And it were strange if the effort to make out this favourable estimate of himself did not succeed, while it is so much more pleasant to attribute one's defect of enterprise to wisdom, which on maturer thought disapproves it, than to imbecility which shrinks from it.

A person of undecisive character wonders how all the embarrassments in the world happened to meet exactly in *his* way, to place him just in that one situation for which he is peculiarly unadapted, but in which he is also willing to think no other man could have acted with facility or confidence. Incapable of setting up a firm purpose on the basis of things as they are, he is often employed in vain speculations on some different supposable state of things, which would have saved him from all this perplexity and irresolution. He thinks what a determined course he could have pursued, *if* his talents, his health, his age, had been different ; if he had been acquainted with some one person sooner ; if his friends were, in this or the other point, different from what they are ; or if fortune had showered her favours on him. And he gives himself as much license to complain, as if all these advantages had been among the rights of his nativity, but refused, by a malignant or capricious fate, to his life. Thus he is occupied—instead of marking with a vigilant eye, and seizing with a strong hand, all the possibilities of his actual situation.

A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself ; since, if he dared to assert that he did, the puny force of some cause, about as powerful, you would have supposed, as a spider, may make a seizure of the hapless boaster the very next moment, and

contemptuously exhibit the futility of the determinations by which he was to have proved the independence of his understanding and his will. He belongs to whatever can make capture of him; and one thing after another vindicates its right to him, by arresting him while he is trying to go on; as twigs and chips, floating near the edge of a river, are intercepted by every weed, and whirled in every little eddy. Having concluded on a design, he may pledge himself to accomplish it—if the hundred diversities of feeling which may come within the week, will let him. His character precluding all foresight of his conduct, he may sit and wonder what form and direction his views and actions are destined to take to-morrow; as a farmer has often to acknowledge that next day's proceedings are at the disposal of its winds and clouds.

This man's notions and determinations always depend very much on other human beings; and what chance for consistency and stability, while the persons with whom he may converse, or transact, are so various? This very evening, he may talk with a man whose sentiments will melt away the present form and outline of his purposes, however firm and defined he may have fancied them to be. A succession of persons whose faculties were stronger than his own, might, in spite of his irresolute re-action, take him and dispose of him as they pleased. Such infirmity of spirit practically confesses him made for subjection, and he passes, like a slave, from owner to owner. Sometimes indeed it happens, that a person so constituted falls into the train, and under the permanent ascendancy, of some one stronger mind, which thus becomes ~~through~~ life the oracle and guide, and gives the inferior a steady will and plan. This, when the governing spirit is wise and virtuous, is a fortunate relief to the feeling, and an advantage gained to the utility, of the subordinate, and as it were, appended mind.

The regulation of every man's plan must greatly depend on the course of events, which come in an order not to be foreseen or prevented. But in accommodating the plans of conduct to the train of events, the difference between two men may be no less than that, in the one instance, the man is subservient to the events, and in the other, the events are made subservient to the man. Some men seem to have been taken along by a succession of events, and, as it were, handed forward in helpless passiveness from one to another; having no determined principle in their own characters, by which they could constrain those events to serve a design formed antecedently to them, or apparently in defiance of them. The events seized them as a neutral material, not they the events. Others, advancing through life with an internal invincible determination, have seemed to make the train of circumstances, whatever they were, conduce as much to their chief design as if they had, by some directing interposition, been brought about on purpose.

It is wonderful how even the casualties of life seem to bow to a spirit that will not bow to them, and yield to subserve a design which they may, in their first apparent tendency, threaten to frustrate.

You may have known such examples, though they are comparatively not numerous. You may have seen a man of this vigorous character in a state of indecision concerning some affair in which it was necessary for him to determine, because it was necessary for him to act. But in this case, his manner would assure you that he would not remain long undecided; you would wonder if you found him still balancing and hesitating the next day. If he explained his thoughts, you would perceive that their clear process, evidently at each effort gaining something toward the result, must certainly reach it ere long. The deliberation of such a mind is a very different thing from the fluctuation of one whose second thinking only upsets the first, and whose third confounds both. To *know how* to obtain a determination, is one of the first requisites and indications of a rationally decisive character.

When the decision was arrived at, and a plan of action approved, you would feel an assurance that something would absolutely be done. It is characteristic of such a mind, to think for effect; and the pleasure of escaping from temporary doubt gives an additional impulse to the force with which it is carried into action. The man will not re-examine his conclusions with endless repetition, and he will not be delayed long by consulting other persons, after he had ceased to consult himself. He cannot bear to sit still among ~~un~~executed decisions and unattempted projects. We wait to hear of his achievements, and are confident we shall not wait long. The possibility or the means may not be obvious to us, but we know that every thing will be attempted, and that a spirit of such determined will is like a river, which, in whatever manner it is obstructed, will make its way somewhere. It must have cost Cæsar many anxious hours of deliberation, before he decided to pass the Rubicon*; but it is probable he suffered but few to elapse between the decision and the execution. And any one of his friends, who should have been apprised of his determination, and understood his character, would have smiled contemptuously to hear it insinuated that though Cæsar had resolved, Cæsar would not dare; or that though he might cross the Rubicon, whose opposite bank presented to him no hostile legions, he might come to other rivers, which he would not cross; or that either rivers, or any other obstacle, would deter him from prosecuting his determination from this ominous commencement to its very last consequence.

One signal advantage possessed by a mind of this character is,

* The Rubicon was a river in Central Italy, forming the southern boundary of the province under Julius Cæsar. By crossing it, he virtually declared war against the Republic. To "cross the Rubicon" is to take a step that cannot be recalled.

that its passions are not wasted. The whole measure of passion of which any one, with important transactions before him, is capable, is not more than enough to supply interest and energy for the required practical exertions ; and therefore as little as possible of this costly flame should be expended in a way that does not augment the force of action. But nothing can less contribute or be more destructive to vigour of action, than protracted anxious fluctuation, through resolutions adopted, rejected, resumed, suspended ; while yet nothing causes a greater expense of feeling. The heart is fretted and exhausted by being subjected to an alternation of contrary excitements, with the ultimate mortifying consciousness of their contributing to no end. The long-wavering deliberation, whether to perform some bold action of difficult virtue, has often cost more to feeling than the action itself, or a series of such actions, would have cost ; with the great disadvantage too of not being relieved by any of that invigoration which the man in action finds in the activity itself, that spirit created to renovate the energy which the action is expending. When the passions are not consumed among dubious musings and abortive resolutions, their utmost value and use can be secured by throwing all their animating force into effective operation.

Another advantage of this character, is, that it exempts from a great deal of interference and obstructive annoyance, which an irresolute man may be almost sure to encounter. Weakness, in every form, tempts arrogance ; and a man may be allowed to wish for a kind of character with which stupidity and impertinence may not make so free. When a firm decisive spirit is recognised, it is curious to see how the space clears around a man, and leaves him room and freedom. The disposition to interrogate, dictate, or banter, preserves a respectful and politic distance, judging it not unwise to keep the peace with a person of so much energy. A conviction that he understands and that he wills with extraordinary force, silences the conceit that intended to perplex or instruct him, and intimidates the malice that was disposed to attack him. There is a feeling, as in respect to Fate, that the decrees of so inflexible a spirit *must* be right, or that, at least, they *will* be accomplished.

But not only will he secure the freedom of acting for himself, he will obtain also by degrees the coincidence of those in whose company he is to transact the business of life. If the manners of such a man be free from arrogance, and he can qualify his firmness with a moderate degree of insinuation ; and if his measures have partly lost the appearance of being the dictates of his will, under the wider and softer sanction of some experience that they are reasonable ; both competition and fear will be laid to sleep, and his will may acquire an unresisted ascendancy over many who will be pleased to fall into the mechanism of a system, which they find makes them more suc-

cessful and happy than they could have been amidst the anxiety of adjusting plans and expedients of their own, and the consequences of often adjusting them ill. I have known several parents, both fathers and mothers, whose management of their families has answered this description ; and has displayed a striking example of the facile complacency with which a number of persons, of different ages and dispositions, will yield to the decisions of a firm mind, acting on an equitable and enlightened system.

The last resource of this character, is, hard inflexible pertinacity, on which it may be allowed to rest its strength after finding it can be effectual in none of its milder forms. I remember admiring an instance of this kind, in a firm, sagacious and estimable old man, whom I well knew and who has long been dead. Being on a jury, in a trial of life and death, he was satisfied of the innocence of the prisoner ; the other eleven were of the opposite opinion. But he was resolved the man should not be condemned ; and as the first effort for preventing it, very properly made application to the *minds* of his associates, spending several hours in labouring to convince them. But he found he made no impression, while he was exhausting the strength which it was necessary to reserve for another mode of operation. He then calmly told them that it should now be a trial who could endure confinement and famine the longest, and that they might be quite assured he would sooner die than release them at the expense of the prisoner's life. In this situation they spent about twenty-four hours ; when at length all acceded to his verdict of ~~acquitted~~.

It is not necessary to amplify on the indispensable importance of this quality, in order to the accomplishment of any thing eminently good. We instantly see, that every path to signal excellence is so obstructed and beset, that none but a spirit so qualified can pass. But it is time to examine what are the elements of that mental constitution which is displayed in the character in question.

LETTER II.

[Decision of Character partly dependent upon the Constitution of the Body. Characteristics of Decision: I. Complete Confidence in one's own Judgment.]

PERHAPS the best mode would be, to bring into our thoughts, in succession, the most remarkable examples of this character that we have known in real life, or that we have read of in history or even in fiction ; and attentively to observe, in their conversations, manners, and actions, what principles appear to produce, or to constitute, this commanding distinction. You will easily pursue this investigation yourself. I lately made a partial attempt, and shall offer you a number of suggestions.

As a previous observation, it is beyond all doubt that very much depends on the constitution of the body. It would be for physiologists to explain, if it were explicable, the *manner* in which corporeal organization affects the mind; I only assume it as a fact, that there is in the material construction of some persons, much more than of others, some quality which augments, if it do not create, both the stability of their resolution, and the energy of their active tendencies. There is something that, like the ligatures which one class of the Olympic combatants* bound on their hands and wrists, braces round, if I may so describe it, and compresses the powers of the mind, giving them a steady forcible spring and reaction, which they would presently lose if they could be transferred into a constitution of soft, yielding, treacherous debility. The action of strong character seems to demand something firm in its material basis, as massive engines require, for their weight and for their working, to be fixed on a solid foundation. Accordingly I believe it would be found, that a majority of the persons most remarkable for decisive character, have possessed great constitutional physical firmness. I do not mean an exemption from disease and pain, nor any certain measure of mechanical strength, but a tone of vigour, the opposite to lassitude, and adapted to great exertion and endurance. This is clearly evinced in respect to many of them, by the prodigious labours and deprivations which they have borne in prosecuting their designs. The physical nature has seemed a proud ally of the moral one, and with a hardness that would never shrink, has sustained the energy that could never remit.

A view of the disparities between the different races of animals inferior to man, will show the effect of organization on disposition. Compare, for instance, a lion with the common beasts of our fields, many of them larger in bulk of animated substance. What a vast superiority of courage, and impetuous and determined action; which difference we attribute to some great dissimilarity of modification in the composition of the animated material. Now it is probable that a difference somewhat analogous subsists between some human beings and others in point of what we may call mere physical constitution; and that this is no small part of the cause of the striking inequalities in respect to decisive character. A man who excels in the power of decision has probably more of the physical quality of a lion in his composition than other men.

It is observable that women in general have less inflexibility of character than men; and though many moral influences contribute to this difference, the principal cause may probably be something less firm in the corporeal constitution. Now that physical quality, whatever it is, from the smaller measure of which in the constitu-

* The Olympic Games were the most celebrated among the ancient Greeks. They were held on the plain of Olympia in the south of Greece.

tion of the frame, women have less firmness than men, may be possessed by one man more than by men in general in a greater degree of difference than that by which men in general exceed women.

If there have been found some resolute spirits powerfully asserting themselves in feeble vehicles, it is so much the better; since this would authorize a hope, that if all the other grand requisites can be combined, they may form a strong character, in spite of an unadapted constitution. And on the other hand, no constitutional hardness will form the true character, without those superior properties; though it may produce that false and contemptible kind of decision which we term *obstinacy*; a stubbornness of temper, which can assign no reasons but mere will, for a constancy which acts in the nature of dead weight rather than of strength; resembling less the reaction of a powerful spring than the gravitation of a big stone.

The first prominent mental characteristic of the person whom I describe, is, a complete confidence in his own judgment. It will perhaps be said, that this is not so uncommon a qualification. I however think it is uncommon. It is indeed obvious enough, that almost all men have a flattering estimate of their own understanding, and that as long as this understanding has no harder task than to form opinions which are not to be tried in action, they have a most self-complacent assurance of being right. This assurance extends to the judgments which they pass on the proceedings of others. But let them be brought into the necessity of adopting actual measures in an untried situation, where, unassisted by any previous ~~example~~ or practice, they are reduced to depend on the bare resources of judgment alone, and you will see in many cases, this confidence of opinion vanish away. The mind seems all at once placed in a misty vacuity, where it reaches round on all sides, but can find nothing to take hold of. Or if not lost in vacuity, it is overwhelmed in confusion; and feels as if its faculties were annihilated in the attempt to think of schemes and calculations among the possibilities, chances, and hazards which overspread a wide untrod-den field; and this conscious imbecility becomes severe distress, when it is believed that consequences, of serious or unknown good or evil, are depending on the decisions which are to be formed amidst so much uncertainty. The thought painfully recurs at each step and turn, I may by chance be right, but it is fully as probably I am wrong. It is like the case of a rustic walking in London, who, having no certain direction through the vast confusion of streets to the place where he wishes to be, advances, and hesitates, and turns, and inquires, and becomes, at each corner, still more inextricably perplexed.* A man in this situation feels he shall be very unfortu-

* "Why does not the man call a hackney-coach?" a gay reader, I am aware, will say of the person so bemazed in the great town. So he might, certainly; (that

nate if he cannot accomplish more than he can understand.—Is not this frequently, when brought to the practical test, the state of a mind not disposed in general to undervalue its own judgment?

In cases where judgment is not so completely bewildered, you will yet perceive a great practical distrust of it. A man has perhaps advanced a considerable way towards a decision, but then lingers at a small distance from it, till necessity, with a stronger hand than conviction, impels him upon it. He cannot see the whole length of the question, and suspects the part beyond his sight to be the most important, for the most essential point and stress of it may be there. He fears that certain possible consequences, if they should follow, would cause him to reproach himself for his present determination. He wonders how this or the other person would have acted in the same circumstances; eagerly catches at any thing like a respectable precedent; would be perfectly willing to forego the pride of setting an example, for the safety of following one; and looks anxiously round to know what each person may think on the subject; while the various and opposite opinions to which he listens, perhaps only serve to confound his perception of the track of thought by which he had hoped to reach his conclusion. Even when that conclusion is obtained, there are not many minds that might not be brought a few degrees back into dubious hesitation, by a man of respected understanding saying, in a confident tone, Your plan is injudicious; your selection is unfortunate; the event will disappoint you.

It cannot be supposed that I am maintaining such an absurdity as that a man's complete reliance on his own judgment is a proof of its strength and rectitude. Intense stupidity may be in this point the rival of clear-sighted wisdom. I had once some knowledge of a person whom no mortal could have surpassed, not Cromwell* or Strafford,† in confidence in his own judgment and consequent inflexibility of conduct; while at the same time his successive schemes were ill-judged to a degree that made his disappointments ridiculous still more than pitiable. He was not an example of that *simple* obstinacy which I have mentioned before; for he considered his measures, and did not want for reasons which seriously satisfied himself of their being most judicious. This confidence of opinion may be possessed by a person in whom it will be contemptible or mischievous; but its proper place is in a very different character, and without it there can be no dignified actors in human affairs.

If, after it is seen how foolish this confidence appears as a feature in a weak character, it be inquired what, in a rightfully

is, if he know where to find one;) and the gay reader and I have only to deplore that there is no parallel convenience for the assistance of perplexed understandings.

* Oliver Cromwell, "Lord Protector" of England who died in 1658.

† The Earl of Strafford, executed in 1641, for trying to make Charles I. absolute.

decisive person's manner of thinking it is that authorizes him in this firm assurance that his view of the concerns before him is comprehensive and accurate; he may, in answer, justify his confidence on such grounds as these: that he is conscious that objects are presented to his mind with an exceedingly distinct and perspicuous aspect, not like the shapes of moon-light, or like Ossian's* ghosts, dim forms of uncircumscribed shade; that he sees the different parts of the subject in an arranged order, not in unconnected fragments: that in each deliberation the main object keeps its clear pre-eminence, and he perceives the bearings which the subordinate and conducive ones have on it; that perhaps several trains of thought, drawn from different points, lead him to the same conclusion; and that he finds his judgment does not vary in servility to the moods of his feelings.

It may be presumed that a high degree of this character is not attained without a considerable measure of that kind of certainty, with respect to the relations of things, which can be acquired only from experience and observation. A very protracted course of time, however, may not be indispensable for this discipline. An extreme vigilance in the exercise of observation, and a strong and strongly exerted power of generalizing on experience, may have made a comparatively short time enough to supply a large share of the wisdom derivable from these sources; so that a man may long before he is old be rich in the benefits of experience, and therefore may have all the decision of judgment legitimately founded on that accomplishment. This knowledge from experience he will be able to apply in a direct and immediate manner, and without refining it into general principles, to some situations of affairs, so as to anticipate the consequences of certain actions in those situations by as plain a reason, and as confidently, as the kind of fruit to be produced by a given kind of tree. Thus far the facts of his experience will serve him as precedents; cases of such near resemblance to those in which he is now to act as to afford him a rule by the most immediate inference. At the next step, he will be able to apply this knowledge, now converted into general principles, to a multitude of cases bearing but a partial resemblance to any thing he has actually witnessed. And then, in looking forward to the possible occurrence of altogether new combinations of circumstances, he can trust to the resources which he is persuaded his intellect will open to him, or is humbly confident, if he be a devout man, that the Supreme Intelligence will not suffer to be wanting to him, when the occasion arrives. In proportion as his views include, at all events, more certainties than those of other men, he is with good reason less fearful of contingencies. And if, in the course of executing his design, un-

* An Irish or Scottish warrior-poet, who is said to have lived in the 3rd century A.D. His history is very uncertain.

expected disastrous events should befall, but which are not owing to any thing wrong in the plan and principles of that design, but to foreign causes ; it will be characteristic of a strong mind to attribute these events discriminatively to their own causes, and not to the *plan*, which, therefore, instead of being disliked and relinquished, will be still as much approved as before, and the man will proceed calmly to the sequel of it without any change of arrangement ;— unless indeed these sinister events should be of such consequence as to alter the whole state of things to which the plan was correctly adapted, and so create a necessity to form an entirely new one, adapted to that altered state.

Though he do not absolutely despise the understandings of other men, he will perceive their dimensions as compared with his own, which will preserve its independence through every communication and encounter. It is however a part of this very independence, that he will hold himself free to alter his opinion, if the information which may be communicated to him shall bring sufficient reason. And as no one is so sensible of the importance of a complete acquaintance with a subject as the man who is always endeavouring to think conclusively, he will listen with the utmost attention to the *information*, which may sometimes be received from persons for whose *judgment* he has no great respect. The information which they may afford him is not at all the less valuable for the circumstance, that his practical inferences from it may be quite different from theirs. If they will only give him an accurate account of facts, he does not care how indifferently they may reason on them. Counsel will in general have only so much weight with ~~him~~ as it supplies knowledge which may assist his judgment ; he will yield nothing to it implicitly as authority, except when it comes from persons of approved and eminent wisdom ; but he may hear it with more candour and good temper, from being conscious of this independence of his judgment, than the man who is afraid lest the first person that begins to persuade him, should baffle his determination. He feels it entirely a work of his own to deliberate and to resolve, amidst all the advice which may be attempting to control him. If, with an assurance of his intellect being of the highest order, he also holds a commanding station, he will feel it gratuitous to consult with any one, excepting merely to receive statements of facts. This appears to be exemplified in the man,* who has lately shown the nations of Europe how large a portion of the world may, when Heaven permits, be at the mercy of the solitary workings of an individual mind.

The strongest trial of this determination of judgment is in those cases of urgency where something must immediately be done, and

* Napoleon Bonaparte. The Essay was published in 1805, when Napoleon was at the height of his power.

the alternative of right or wrong is of important consequence ; as in the duty of a medical man, treating a patient whose situation at once requires a daring practice, and puts it in painful doubt what to dare. A still stronger illustration is the case of a general who is compelled, in the very instant, to make dispositions on which the event of a battle, the lives of thousands of his men, or perhaps almost the fate of a nation, may depend. He may even be placed in a dilemma which appears equally dreadful on both sides. Such a predicament is described in Denon's account of one of the sanguinary conflicts between the French and Mamelukes,* as having for a while held in the most distressing hesitation General Desaix, though a prompt and intrepid commander.

LETTER III.

[The Second Element of Decision, a Strenuous Will. Illustrations : Revenge, Recovery of Inheritance, Benevolence.]

THIS indispensable basis, confidence of opinion, is however not enough to constitute the character in question. For many persons, who have been conscious and proud of a much stronger grasp of thought than ordinary men, and have held the most decided opinions on important things to be done, have yet exhibited, in the listlessness or inconstancy of their actions, a contrast and a disgrace to the operations of their understandings. For want of some cogent feeling impelling them to carry every internal decision into action, they have been still left where they were ; and a dignified judgment has been seen in the hapless plight of having no effective forces to execute its decrees.

It is evident then, (and I perceive I have partly anticipated this article in the first letter,) that another essential principle of the character is, a total incapability of surrendering to indifference or delay the serious determinations of the mind. A strenuous *will* must accompany the conclusions of thought, and constantly incite the utmost efforts to give them a practical result. The intellect must be invested, if I may so describe it, with a glowing atmosphere of passion, under the influence of which the cold dictates of reason take fire, and spring into active powers.

Revert once more in your thoughts to the persons most remarkably distinguished by this quality. You will perceive, that instead of allowing themselves to sit down delighted after the labour of successful thinking, as if they had completed some great thing, they regard this labour but as a circumstance of preparation, and the conclusions resulting from it as of no more value, (till going into

* The former Egyptian cavalry, defeated by Desaix in 1799. Denon, a French writer, gives an account of the battle.

effect,) than the entombed lamps of the Rosicrucians.* They are not disposed to be content in a region of mere ideas, while they ought to be advancing into the field of corresponding realities ; they retire to that region sometimes, as ambitious adventurers anciently went to Delphi,† to consult, but not to reside. You will therefore find them almost uniformly in determined pursuit of some object, on which they fix a keen and steady look, never losing sight of it while they follow it through the confused multitude of other things.

A person actuated by such a spirit seems by his manner to say, Do you think that I would not disdain to adopt a purpose which I would not devote my utmost force to effect ; or that having thus devoted my exertions, I will intermit or withdraw them, through indolence, debility, or caprice ; or that I will surrender my object to any interference except the uncontrollable dispensations of Providence ? No, I am linked to my determination with iron bands ; it clings to me as if a part of my destiny ; and if its frustration be, on the contrary, doomed a part of that destiny, it is doomed so only through calamity or death.

This display of systematic energy seems to indicate a constitution of mind in which the passions are commensurate with the intellectual part, and at the same time hold an inseparable correspondence with it, like the faithful sympathy of the tides with the phases of the moon. There is such an equality and connexion, that subjects of the decisions of judgment become proportionally and of course the objects of passion. When the judgment decides with a very strong preference, that same strength of preference, actuating also the passions, devotes them with energy to the object, as long as it is thus approved ; and this will produce such a conduct as I have described. When therefore a firm, self-confiding, and unaltering judgment fails to make a decisive character, it is evident either that the passions in that mind are too languid to be capable of a strong and unremitting excitement, which defect makes an indolent or irresolute man ; or that they perversely sometimes coincide with judgment and sometimes clash with it, which makes an inconsistent or versatile man.

There is no man so irresolute as not to act with determination in many single cases, where the motive is powerful and simple, and where there is no need of plan and perseverance ; but this gives no claim to the term *character*, which expresses the habitual tenour of a man's active being. The character may be displayed in the successive unconnected undertakings, which are each of limited extent,

* Members of a secret society in the 17th century. They pretended to have found out everburning lamps. They were said to be kept in a tomb, and when any person tried to get in, a man in armour struck them out.

† A place in Greece, where the priestesses of the god Apollo, in ancient times, were supposed to answer questions.

and end with the attainment of their particular objects. But it is seen in its most commanding aspect in those grand schemes of action, which have no necessary point of conclusion, which continue on through successive years, and extend even to that dark period when the agent himself is withdrawn from human sight.

I have repeatedly, in conversation, remarked to you the effect of what has been called a Ruling Passion. When its object is noble, and an enlightened understanding regulates its movements, it appears to me a great felicity ; but whether its object be noble or not, it infallibly creates, where it exists in great force, that active ardent constancy, which I describe as a capital feature of the decisive character. The Subject of such a commanding passion wonders, if indeed he were at leisure to wonder, at the persons who pretend to attach importance to an object which they make none but the most languid efforts to secure. The utmost powers of the man are constrained into the service of the favourite Cause by this passion, which sweeps away, as it advances, all the trivial objections and little opposing motives, and seems almost to open a way through impossibilities. This spirit comes on him in the morning as soon as he recovers his consciousness, and commands and impels him through the day, with a power from which he could not emancipate himself if he would. When the force of habit is added, the determination becomes invincible, and seems to assume rank with the great laws of nature, making it nearly as certain that such a man will persist in his course as that in the morning the sun will rise.

A persisting untameable efficacy of soul gives a seductive and pernicious dignity even to a character which every moral principle forbids us to approve. Often in the narrations of history and fiction, an agent of the most dreadful designs compels a sentiment of deep respect for the unconquerable mind displayed in their execution. While we shudder at his activity, we say with regret, mingled with an admiration which borders on partiality, What a noble being this would have been, if goodness had been his destiny ! The partiality is evinced in the very selection of terms, by which we show that we are tempted to refer his atrocity rather to his destiny than to his choice. I wonder whether an emotion like this, have not been experienced by each reader of *Paradise Lost*, relative to the Leader* of the infernal spirits ; a proof, if such were the fact, of some insinuation of evil into the magnificent creation of the poet. In some of the high examples of ambition (the ambition which is a vice), we almost revere the force of mind which impelled them forward through the longest series of action, superior to doubt and fluctuation, and disdainful of ease, of pleasures, of opposition, and of danger. We bend in homage before the ambitious spirit which reached the

* Satan, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

true sublime in the reply of Pompey* to his friends, who dissuaded him from hazarding his life on a tempestuous sea in order to be at Rome on an important occasion: "It is necessary for me to go, it is not necessary for me to live."

Revenge has produced wonderful examples of this unremitting constancy to a purpose. Zanga is a well-supported illustration. And you may have read of a real instance of a Spaniard, who, being injured by another inhabitant of the same town, resolved to destroy him; the other was apprised of this, and removed with the utmost secrecy, as he thought, to another town at a considerable distance, where however he had not been more than a day or two, before he found that his enemy also was there. He removed in the same manner to several parts of the kingdom, remote from each other; but in every place quickly perceived that his deadly pursuer was near him. At last he went to South America, where he had enjoyed his security but a very short time, before his relentless pursuer came up with him, and accomplished his purpose.

You may recollect the mention in one of our conversations, of a young man who wasted in two or three years a large patrimony, in profligate revels with a number of worthless associates calling themselves his friends, till his last means were exhausted, when they of course treated him with neglect or contempt. Reduced to absolute want, he one day went out of the house with an intention to put an end to his life; but wandering awhile almost unconsciously, he came to the brow of an eminence which overlooked what were lately his estates. Here he sat down, and remained fixed in thought a number of hours, at the end of which he sprang from the ground with a vehement exulting emotion. He had formed his resolution, which was that all these estates should be his again; he had formed his plan too, which he instantly began to execute. He walked hastily forward, determined to seize the very first opportunity, of however humble a kind, to gain any money, though it were ever so despicable a trifle, and resolved absolutely not to spend, if he could help it, a farthing of whatever he might obtain. The first thing that drew his attention was a heap of coals shot out of carts on the pavement before a house. He offered himself to shovel or wheel them into the place where they were to be laid, and was employed. He received a few pence for the labour; and then, in pursuance of the saving part of his plan, requested some small gratuity of meat and drink, which was given him. He then looked out for the next thing that might chance to offer; and went, with indefatigable industry, through a succession of servile employments, in different places, of longer and shorter duration, still scrupulously avoiding, as far as possible, the expense of a penny. He promptly seized every opportunity which could advance his design, without

* The great rival of Julius Cæsar, murdered 49 B.C., when landing in Egypt.

regarding the meanness of occupation or appearance. By this method he had gained, after a considerable time, money enough to purchase, in order to sell again, a few cattle, of which he had taken pains to understand the value. He speedily but cautiously turned his first gains into second advantages; retained without a single deviation his extreme parsimony; and thus advanced by degrees into larger transactions and incipient wealth. I did not hear, or have forgotten the continued course of his life; but the final result was, that he more than recovered his lost possessions, and died an inveterate miser, worth 60,000*l*. I have always recollected this as a signal instance, though in an unfortunate and ignoble direction, of decisive character, and of the extraordinary *effect*, which, according to general laws, belongs to the strongest form of such a character.

But not less decision has been displayed by men of virtue. In this distinction no man ever exceeded, or ever will exceed, for instance, the late illustrious Howard.*

The energy of his determination was so great, that if, instead of being habitual, it had been shown only for a short time on particular occasions, it would have appeared a vehement impetuosity; but by being unintermitted, it had an equability of manner which scarcely appeared to exceed the tone of a calm constancy, it was so totally the reverse of any thing like turbulence or agitation. It was the calmness of an intensity kept uniform by the nature of the human mind forbidding it to be more, and by the character of the individual forbidding it to be less. The habitual passion of his mind was a pitch of excitement and impulsion almost equal to the temporary extremes and paroxysms of common minds; as a great river, in its customary state, is equal to a small or moderate one when swollen to a torrent.

The moment of finishing his plans in deliberation, and commencing them in action, was the same. I wonder what must have been the amount of that bribe, in emolument or pleasure, that would have detained him a week inactive after their final adjustment. The law which carries water down a declivity was not more unconquerable and invariable than the determination of his feeling toward the main object. The importance of this object held his faculties in a state of determination which was too rigid to be affected by lighter interests, and on which therefore the beauties of nature and of art had no power. He had no leisure feeling which he could spare to be diverted among the innumerable varieties of the extensive scene which he traversed; his subordinate feelings nearly lost their separate existence and operation, by falling into the grand one. There have not been wanting trivial minds, to mark this as a fault

* John Howard, a good Englishman, who devoted his life to prison reform. Fault was found with him by some, because, when in Rome, he did not spend part of his time in looking at pictures and statues. He died in the south of Russia in 1790.

in his character. But the mere men of taste ought to be silent respecting such a man as Howard ; he is above their sphere of judgment. The invisible spirits, who fulfil their commission of philanthropy among mortals, do not care about pictures, statues, and sumptuous buildings ; and no more did he, when the time in which he must have inspected and admired them, would have been taken from the work to which he had consecrated his life. The curiosity which he might feel, was reduced to wait till the hour should arrive, when its gratification should be presented by conscience, (which kept a scrupulous charge of all his time,) as the *duty* of that hour. If he was still at every hour, when it came, fated to feel the attractions of the fine arts but the second claim, they might be sure of their revenge ; for no other man will ever visit Rome under such a despotic acknowledged rule of duty as to refuse himself time for surveying the magnificence of its ruins. Such a sin against taste is very far beyond the reach of common saintship to commit. It implied an inconceivable severity of conviction, that he had *one thing to do*, and that he who would do some great thing in this short life, must apply himself to the work with such a concentration of his forces, as, to idle spectators, who live only to amuse themselves, looks like insanity.

His attention was so strongly and tenaciously fixed on his object, that even at the greatest distance, as the Egyptian pyramids to travellers, it appeared to him with a luminous distinctness as if it had been nigh, and beguiled the toilsome length of labour and enterprise by which he was to reach it. So conspicuous was it before him, that not a step deviated from the direction, and every movement and every day was an approximation. As his method referred every thing he did and thought to the end, and as his exertion did not relax for a moment, he made the trial, so seldom made, what is the utmost effect which may be granted to the last possible efforts of a human agent : and therefore what he did not accomplish, he might conclude to be placed beyond the sphere of mortal activity, and calmly leave to the immediate disposal of Providence.

Unless the eternal happiness of mankind be an insignificant concern, and the passion to promote it an inglorious distinction, I may cite George Whitefield* as a noble instance of this attribute of the decisive character, this intense necessity of action. The great cause which was so languid a thing in the hands of many of its advocates, assumed in his administrations, an unmitigable urgency.

Many of the christian missionaries among the heathen, such as Brainerd, Elliot, and Schwartz,† have displayed memorable examples

* A very zealous and eloquent English preacher of last century. He died in America in 1770.

† Brainerd and Elliot were missionaries in North America ; Schwartz laboured in South India.

of this dedication of their whole being to their office, this abjuration of all the quiescent feelings.

This would be the proper place for introducing (if I did not hesitate to introduce in any connexion with merely human instances) the example of him who said, "I must be about my Father's business. My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

LETTER IV.

[Third Element, Courage. Ability to bear Censure, Ridicule, Suffering. Examples: Pizarro, Luther. A Combination of the Principles necessary. Illustrations: Lady Macbeth, Richard III., Cromwell.]

AFTER the illustrations on the last article, it will seem but a very slight transition when I proceed to specify Courage, as an essential part of the decisive character. An intelligent man, adventurous only in thought, may sketch the most excellent scheme, and after duly admiring it, and himself as its author, may be reduced to say, What a noble spirit that would be which should dare to realize this! A noble spirit! is it I? And his heart may answer in the negative, while he glances a mortified thought of inquiry round to recollect persons who would venture what he dares not, and almost hopes not to find them. Or if by extreme effort he has brought himself to a resolution of braving the difficulty, he is compelled to execrate the timid lingerings that still keep him back from the trial. A man endowed with the complete character, might say, with a sober consciousness as remote from the spirit of bravado as it is from timidity, Thus, and thus, is my conviction and my determination; now for the phantoms of fear; let me look them in the face; their menacing glare and ominous tones will be lost on me; "I dare do all that may become a man." I trust I shall firmly confront every thing that threatens me while prosecuting my purpose, and I am prepared to meet the consequences of it when it is accomplished. I should despise a being, though it were myself, whose agency could be held enslaved by the gloomy shapes of imagination, by the haunting recollections of a dream, by the whistling or the howling of winds, by the shriek of owls, by the shades of midnight, or by the threats or frowns of man. I should be indignant to feel that, in the commencement of an adventure, I could think of nothing but the deep pit by the side of the way where I must walk, into which I may slide, the mad animal which it is not impossible that I may meet, or the assassin who may lurk in a thicket of yonder wood. And I disdain to compromise the interests that rouse me to action, for the privilege of an ignoble security.

As the conduct of a man of decision is always individual, and often singular, he may expect some serious trials of courage. For one thing, he may be encountered by the strongest disapprobation of many of his connexions, and the censure of the greater part of the society where he is known. In this case, it is not a man of common spirit that can show himself just as at other times, and meet their anger in the same undisturbed manner as he would meet some ordinary inclemency of the weather; that can, without harshness or violence, continue to effect every moment some part of his design, coolly replying to each ungracious look and indignant voice, *I am sorry to oppose you : I am not unfriendly to you, while thus persisting in what excites your displeasure ; it would please me to have your approbation and concurrence, and I think I should have them if you would seriously consider my reasons ; but meanwhile, I am superior to opinion, I am not to be intimidated by reproaches, nor would your favour and applause be any reward for the sacrifice of my object. As you can do without my approbation, I can certainly do without yours ; it is enough that I can approve myself, it is enough that I appeal to the last authority in the creation. Amuse yourselves as you may, by continuing to censure or to rail ; I must continue to act.*

The attack of contempt and ridicule is perhaps a still greater trial of courage. It is felt by all to be an admirable thing, when it can in no degree be ascribed to the hardness of either stupidity or confirmed depravity, to sustain for a considerable time, or in numerous instances, the looks of scorn, or an unrestrained shower of taunts and jeers, with perfect composure, and proceed immediately after, or at the time, on the business that provokes all this ridicule. This invincibility of temper will often make even the scoffers themselves tired of the sport : they begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor sort of hostility to joke and sneer ; and there is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain than their scorn. Till, however, a man shall become a veteran, he must reckon on sometimes meeting this trial in the course of virtuous enterprise. And if, at the suggestion of some meritorious but unprecedented proceeding, I hear him ask, with a look and tone of shrinking alarm. But will they not laugh at me ?—I know that he is not the person whom this essay attempts to describe. A man of the right kind would say, They will smile, they will laugh, will they ? Much good may it do them. I have something else to do than to trouble myself about their mirth. I do not care if the whole neighbourhood were to laugh in a chorus. I should indeed be sorry to see or hear such a number of fools, but pleased enough to find that they considered me as an outlaw to their tribe. The good to result from my project will not be less, because vain and shallow minds that cannot understand it, are diverted at it and at me. What should I think of my

pursuits, if every trivial thoughtless being could comprehend or would applaud them ; and of myself, if my courage needed levity and ignorance for their allies, or could be abashed at their sneers ?

I remember, that on reading the account of the project for conquering Peru, formed by Almagro, Pizarro, and De Luques,* while abhorring the actuating principle of the men, I could not help admiring the hardihood of mind which made them regardless of scorn. These three individuals, before they had obtained any associates, or arms, or soldiers, or more than a very imperfect knowledge of the power of the kingdom they were to conquer, celebrated a solemn mass in one of the great churches, as a pledge and a commencement of the enterprise, amidst the astonishment and contempt expressed by a multitude of people for what was deemed a monstrous project. They, however, proceeded through the service, and afterwards to their respective departments of preparation, with an apparently entire insensibility to all this triumphant contempt ; and thus gave the first proof of possessing that invincible firmness with which they afterwards prosecuted their design, till they attained a success, the destructive process and many of the results of which humanity has ever deplored.

Milton's Abdiel† is a noble illustration of the courage that rises invincible above the derision not only of the multitude, but of the proud and elevated.

But there may be situations where decision of character will be brought to trial against evils of a darker aspect than disapprobation or contempt. There may be the threatening of serious sufferings ; and very often, to dare as far as conscience or a great cause required, has been to dare to die. In almost all plans of great enterprise, a man must systematically dismiss, at the entrance, every wish to stipulate with his destiny for safety. He voluntarily treads within the precincts of danger ; and though it be possible he may escape, he ought to be prepared with the fortitude of a self-devoted victim. This is the inevitable condition on which heroes, travellers or missionaries among savage nations, and reformers on a grand scale, must commence their career. Either they must allay their fire of enterprise, or abide the liability to be exploded by it from the world.

The last decisive energy of a rational courage, which confides in the Supreme Power, is very sublime. It makes a man who intrepidly dares every thing that can oppose or attack him within the whole sphere of mortality ; who will still press toward his object while death is impending over him ; who would retain his purpose unshaken amidst the ruins of the world.

* Three Spanish adventurers who conquered Peru in the 16th Century. Both Almagro and Pizarro met with violent deaths.

† An angel in *Paradise Lost* who remains faithful to God.

It was in the true elevation of this character that Luther,* when cited to appear at the Diet of Worms, under a very questionable assurance of safety from high authority, said to his friends, who conjured him not to go, and warned him by the example of John Huss,* whom, in a similar situation, the same pledge of protection had not saved from the fire, "I am called in the name of God to go, and I would go, though I were certain to meet as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the houses."

A reader of the Bible will not forget Daniel, braving in calm devotion the decree which virtually consigned him to the den of lions : or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, saying to the tyrant, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter," when the "burning fiery" furnace was in sight.

The combination of these several essential principles constitutes that state of mind which is a grand requisite to decision of character, and perhaps its most striking distinction—the full agreement of the mind with itself, the consenting co-operation of all its powers and all its dispositions.

What an unfortunate task it would be for a charioteer, who had harnessed a set of horses, however strong, if he could not make them draw together ; if while one of them would go forward, another was restiff, another struggled backward, another started aside. If even one of the four were unmanageably perverse, while the three were tractable, an aged beggar with his crutch might leave Phaëton† behind. So in a human being, unless the chief forces act consensually, there can be no inflexible vigour, either of will or execution. One dissentient principle in the mind not only deducts so much from the strength and mass of its agency, but counteracts and embarrasses all the rest. If the judgment holds in low estimation that which yet the passions incline to pursue, the pursuit will be irregular and inconstant, though it may have occasional fits of animation, when those passions happen to be highly stimulated. If there is an opposition between judgment and habit, though the man will probably continue to act mainly under the sway of habit in spite of his opinions, yet sometimes the intrusion of those opinions will have for the moment an effect like that of Prospero's‡ wand on the limbs of Ferdinand ; and to be alternately impelled by habit, and checked by opinion, will be a state of vexatious debility. If two principal passions are opposed to each other, they will utterly dis-

* John Huss was a German religious reformer, burnt alive at Constance in 1415, although he had a safe conduct from the Emperor. Martin Luther, the greatest German religious reformer, was ordered to appear before an assembly at Worms. He was warned that although he had a safe conduct from the Emperor Charles V., he might share the fate of John Huss. The text gives his reply.

† The fabled son of Apollo, the sun god, who asked his father to let him drive the chariot of the sun for one day, and thus lost his life.

‡ A character in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, supposed to have a magic wand.

tract any mind, whatever might be the force of its faculties if acting without embarrassment. The one passion may be somewhat stronger than the other, and therefore just prevail barely enough to give a feeble impulse to the conduct of the man ; a feebleness which will continue till there be a greater disparity between these rivals, in consequence of a reinforcement to the slightly ascendant one, by new impressions, or the gradual strengthening of habit forming in its favour. The disparity must be no less than an absolute predominance of the one and subjection of the other, before the prevailing passion will have at liberty from the intestine conflict any large measure of its force to throw activity into the system of conduct. If, for instance, a man feels at once the love of fame which is to be gained only by arduous exertions, and an equal degree of the love of ease or pleasure which precludes those exertions ; if he is eager to show off in splendour, and yet anxious to save money ; if he has the curiosity of adventure, and yet that solicitude for safety, which forbids him to climb a precipice, descend into a cavern, or explore a dangerous wild ; if he has the stern will of a tyrant, and yet the relents of a man ; if he has the ambition to domineer over his fellow-mortals, counteracted by a reluctance to inflict so much mischief as it might cost to subdue them ; we may anticipate the irresolute contradictory tenour of his actions. Especially if conscience, that great troubler of the human breast, loudly declares against a man's wishes or projects, it will be a fatal enemy to decision, till it either reclaim the delinquent passions, or be debauched or laid dead by them.

Lady Macbeth* may be cited as a harmonious character, though the epithet seem strangely applied. She had capacity, ambition, and courage : and she willed the death of the king. Macbeth had still more capacity, ambition, and courage ; and he also willed the murder of the king. But he had, besides, humanity, generosity, conscience, and some measure of what forms the *power* of conscience, the fear of a Superior Being. Consequently, when the dreadful moment approached, he felt an insupportable conflict between these opposite principles, and when it was arrived his utmost courage began to fail. The worst part of his nature fell prostrate under the power of the better ; the angel of goodness arrested the demon that grasped the dagger ; and would have taken that dagger away, if the pure demoniac firmness of his wife, who had none of these counteracting principles, had not shamed and hardened him to the deed.

The poet's delineation of Richard III.† offers a dreadful specimen of this indivisibility of mental impulse. After his determination was fixed, the whole mind with the compactest fidelity supported

* Lady Macbeth, in Shakespeare's play, urges her husband to the murder of Duncan, king of Scotland.

† Richard III., a cruel king of England, killed at the battle of Bosworth, 1485 A.D.

him in prosecuting it. Securely privileged from all interference of doubt that could linger, or humanity that could soften, or timidity that could shrink, he advanced with a concentrated constancy through scene after scene of atrocity, still fulfilling his vow to "cut his way through with a bloody axe." He did not waver while he pursued his object, nor relent when he seized it.

Cromwell (whom I mention as a parallel, of course not to Richard's wickedness, but to his inflexible vigour,) lost his mental consistency in the latter end of a career which had displayed a superlative example of decision. It appears that the wish to be a king, at last arose in a mind which had contemned royalty, and battled it from the land. As far as he really had any republican principles and partialities, this new desire must have been a very untoward associate for them, and must have produced a schism in the breast where all the strong forces of thought and passion had acted till then in concord. The new form of ambition became just predominant enough to carry him, by slow degrees, through the embarrassment and the shame of this incongruity, into an irresolute determination to assume the crown; so irresolute, that he was reduced again to a mortifying indecision by the remonstrances of some of his friends, which he could have slighted, and by an apprehension of the public disapprobation, which he could have braved, if some of the principles of his own mind had not shrunk or revolted from the design. When at last the motives for relinquishing this design prevailed, it was by so small a degree of preponderance, that his reluctant refusal of the offered crown was the voice of only half his soul.

Not only two distinct counteracting passions, but one passion interested for two objects, both equally desirable, but of which the one must be sacrificed, may annihilate in that instance the possibility of a resolute promptitude of conduct. I recollect reading in an old divine, a story from some historian, applicable to this remark. A father went to the agents of a tyrant, to endeavour to redeem his two sons, military men, who, with some other captives of war, were condemned to die. He offered, as a ransom, a sum of money, and to surrender his own life. The tyrant's agents who had them in charge, informed him that this equivalent would be accepted for one of his sons, and for one only, because they should be accountable for the execution of two persons; he might therefore choose which he would redeem. Anxious to save even one of them thus at the expense of his own life, he yet was unable to decide which should die, by choosing the other to live, and remained in the agony of this dilemma so long that they were both irreversibly ordered for execution.

LETTER V.

[Evil Effects of Decision of Character, if misdirected. Care needed. Dangers to be guarded against. Frederick of Prussia.]

It were absurd to suppose that any human being can attain a state of mind capable of acting in all instances invariably with the full power of determination ; but it is obvious that many have possessed a habitual and very commanding measure of it ; and I think the preceding remarks have taken account of its chief characteristics and constituent principles. A number of additional observations remain.

The slightest view of human affairs shows what fatal and widespread mischief may be caused by men of this character, when misled or wicked. You have but to recollect the conquerors, despots, bigots, unjust conspirators, and signal villains of every class, who have blasted society by the relentless vigour which could act consistently and heroically wrong. Till therefore the virtue of mankind be greater, there is reason to be pleased that so few of them are endowed with extraordinary decision.

Even when dignified by wisdom and principle, this quality requires great care in the possessors of it to prevent its becoming unamiable. As it involves much practical assertion of superiority over other human beings, it should be as temperate and conciliating as possible in manner ; else pride will feel provoked, affection hurt, and weakness oppressed. But this is not the manner which will be most natural to such a man ; rather it will be high-toned, laconic, and careless of pleasing. He will have the appearance of keeping himself always at a distance from social equality ; and his friends will feel as if their friendship were continually sliding into subserviency ; while his intimate connexions will think he does not attach the due importance either to their opinions or to their regard. His manner, when they differ from him, or complain, will be too much like the expression of slight estimation, and sometimes of disdain.

When he can accomplish a design by his own personal means alone, he may be disposed to separate himself to the work with the cold self-enclosed individuality on which no one has any hold, which seems to recognise no kindred being in the world, which takes little account of good wishes and kind concern, any more than it cares for opposition ; which seeks neither aid nor sympathy, and seems to say, I do not want any of you, and I am glad that I do not ; leave me alone to succeed or die. This has a very repellent effect on the friends who wished to feel themselves of some importance, in some way or other, to a person whom they are constrained to respect. When assistance is indispensable to his undertakings, his mode of signifying it will seem to command, rather than invite, the co-operation.

In consultation, his manner will indicate that when he is equally with the rest in possession of the circumstances of the case, he does not at all expect to hear any opinions that shall correct his own; but is satisfied that either his present conception of the subject is the just one, or that his own mind must originate that which shall be so. This difference will be apparent between him and his associates, that *their* manner of receiving *his* opinions is that of agreement or dissent; *his* manner of receiving *theirs* is judicial—that of sanction or rejection. He has the tone of authoritatively deciding on what they say, but never of submitting to decision what himself says. Their coincidence with his views does not give him a firmer assurance of his being right, nor their dissent any other impression than that of their incapacity to judge. If his feeling took the distinct form of a reflection, it would be, Mine is the business of comprehending and devising, and I am here to rule this company, and not to consult them; I want their docility, and not their arguments; I am come, not to seek their assistance in thinking, but to determine their concurrence in executing what is already thought for them. Of course, many suggestions and reasons which appear important to those they come from will be disposed of by him with a transient attention, or a light facility, that will seem very disrespectful to persons who possibly hesitate to admit that he is a demi-god, and that they are but idiots. Lord Chatham, in going out of the House of Commons, just as one of the speakers against him concluded his speech by emphatically urging what he perhaps rightly thought the unanswerable question. “*Where can we find means to support such a war?*” turned round a moment, and gaily chanted, “Gentle shepherd, tell me where?”

Even the assenting convictions and practical compliances, yielded by degrees to this decisive man, may be somewhat undervalued; as they will appear to him no more than simply coming, and that very slowly, to a right apprehension; whereas *he* understood and decided justly from the first, and has been right all this while.

He will be in danger of rejecting the just claims of charity for a little tolerance to the prejudices, hesitation, and timidity, of those with whom he has to act. He will say to himself, I wish there were any thing like manhood among the beings called men; and that they could have the sense and spirit not to let themselves be hampered by so many silly notions and childish fears. Why cannot they either determine with some promptitude, or let me, that can, do it for them? Am I to wait till debility become strong, and folly wise?—If full scope be allowed to these tendencies, they may give too much of the character of a tyrant to even a man of elevated virtue, since, in the consciousness of the right intention, and the assurance of the wise contrivance, of his designs, he will hold himself justified in being regardless of every thing but

the accomplishment of them. He will forget all respect for the feelings and liberties of beings who are accounted but a subordinate machinery, to be actuated, or to be thrown aside when not actuated, by the spring of his commanding spirit.

I have before asserted that this strong character *may* be exhibited with a mildness, or at least temperance, of manner; and that, generally, it will thus best secure its efficacy. But this mildness must often be at the cost of great effort; and how much considerate policy or benevolent forbearance it will require, for a man to exert his utmost vigour in the very task, as it will appear to him at the time, of cramping that vigour!—Lycurgus* appears to have been a high example of conciliating patience in the resolute prosecution of designs to be effected among a perverse multitude.

It is probable that the men most distinguished for decision, have not in general possessed a large share of tenderness; and it is easy to imagine, that the laws of our nature will, with great difficulty, allow the combination of the refined sensibilities with a hard, never-shrinking, never-yielding firmness. Is it not almost of the essence of this temperament to be free from even the *perception* of such impressions as cause a mind, weak through susceptibility, to relax or waver; just as the skin of the elephant, or the armour of the rhinoceros, would be but indistinctly sensible to the application of a force by which a small animal, with a skin of thin and delicate texture, would be pierced or lacerated to death? No doubt, this firmness consists partly in a commanding and repressive power over feelings, but it may consist fully as much in not having them. To be exquisitely alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart amidst the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it must be the rarest endowment of humanity.

If you take a view of the first rank of decisive men, you will observe that their faculties have been too much bent to arduous effort, their souls have been kept in too military an attitude, they have been begirt with too much iron, for the melting movements of the heart. Their whole being appears too much arrogated and occupied by the spirit of severe design, urging them toward some defined end, to be sufficiently at ease for the indolent complacency, the soft lassitude of gentle affections, which love to surrender themselves to the present felicities, forgetful of all “enterprises of great pith and moment.” The man seems rigorously intent still on his own affairs, as he walks, or regales, or mingles with domestic society; and appears to despise all the feelings that will not take rank with the grave labours and decisions of intellect, or coalesce with the un-

* A famous lawgiver of Sparta, in the south of Greece, who is supposed to have lived about 900 B.C. His real history is uncertain.

remitting passion which is his spring of action ; he values not feelings which he cannot employ either as weapons or as engines. He loves to be actuated by a passion so strong as to compel into exercise the utmost force of his being, and fix him in a tone, compared with which, the gentle affections, if he had felt them, would be accounted tameness, and their exciting causes insipidity.

Yet we cannot willingly admit that those gentle affections are totally incompatible with the most impregnable resolution and vigour ; nor can we help believing that such men as Timoleon, Alfred, and Gustavus Adolphus,* must have been very fascinating associates in private and domestic life, whenever the urgency of their affairs would allow them to withdraw from the interests of statesmen and warriors, to indulge the affections of men : most fascinating, for, with relations or friends who had any right perceptions, an effect of the strong character would be recognised in a peculiar charm imparted by it to the gentle moods and seasons. The firmness and energy of the man whom nothing could subdue, would exalt the quality of the tenderness which softened him to recline.

But it were much easier to enumerate a long train of ancient and modern examples of the vigour unmitigated by the sensibility. Perhaps indeed these indomitable spirits have yielded sometimes to some species of love, as a mode of amusing their passions for an interval, till greater engagements have summoned them into their proper element ; when they have shown how little the sentiment was an element of the heart, by the ease with which they could relinquish the temporary favorite. In other cases, where there have not been the selfish inducements, which this passion supplies, to the exhibition of something like softness, and where they have been left to the trial of what they might feel of the sympathies of humanity in their simplicity, no rock on earth could be harder.

The celebrated King of Prussia† occurs to me, as a capital instance of the decisive character ; and there occurs to me, at the same time, one of the anecdotes related of him.‡ Intending to make, in the night, an important movement in his camp, which

* Timoleon, a Greek general, who freed Sicily from the dominion of "tyrants." He died about 335 B.C. Alfred the Great, a celebrated king of England, who died, 901 A.D. Gustavus Adolphus, a king of Sweden, noted as a soldier, who was killed in battle, 1632 A.D.

† Frederick II. of Prussia, surnamed the Great. He was a good soldier, and professed also to be a philosopher. He died in 1786.

‡ The authenticity of this anecdote, which I read in some trifling fugitive publication many years since, has been questioned. Possibly enough it might be one of the many stories only half true which could not fail to go abroad concerning a man who made, in his day, so great a figure. But as it does not at all misrepresent the general character of his mind, since there are many incontrovertible facts proving against him as great a degree of cruelty as this anecdote would charge on him, the want of means to prove this one fact does not seem to impose any necessity for omitting the illustration.

was in sight of the enemy, he gave orders that by eight o'clock all the lights in the camp should be put out, on pain of death. The moment that the time was passed, he walked out himself to see whether all were dark. He found a light in the tent of a Captain Zietern, which he entered just as the officer was folding up a letter. Zietern knew him, and instantly fell on his knees to entreat his mercy. The king asked to whom he had been writing; he said it was a letter to his wife, which he had retained the candle these few minutes beyond the time in order to finish. The king coolly ordered him to rise, and write one line more, which he should dictate. This line was to inform his wife, without any explanation, that by such an hour the next day, he should be a dead man. The letter was then sealed, and despatched as it had been intended; and, the next day, the captain was executed. I say nothing of the justice of the punishment itself; but this cool barbarity to the affection both of the officer and his wife, proved how little the decisive hero and reputed philosopher was capable of the tender affections, or of sympathizing with their pains.

At the same time, it is proper to observe, that the case may easily occur, in which a man, sustaining a high responsibility, *must* be resolute to act in a manner which may make him appear to want the finer feelings. He may be placed under the necessity of doing what he knows will cause pain to persons of a character to feel it severely. He may be obliged to resist affectionate wishes, expostulations, entreaties, and tears. Take this same instance. Suppose the wife of Zietern had come to supplicate for him, not only the remission of the punishment of death, but an exemption from any other severe punishment, which was perhaps justly due to the violation of such an order issued no doubt for important reasons; it had then probably been the duty and the virtue of the commander to deny the most interesting suppliant, and to resist the most pathetic appeals which could have been made to his feelings.

LETTER VI.

[Circumstances adapted to confirm Decision of Character: Opposition, Desertion, Success, Association with Inferiors. Possibility of attaining some measure of Decision of Character. Requisites: Clear Knowledge, Conclusive Thinking, Taking a Decided Step, A Noble Object, The Approval of Conscience.]

VARIOUS circumstances might be specified as adapted to confirm such a character as I have attempted to describe. I shall notice two or three.

And first, *opposition*. The passions which inspire men to resistance, and sustain them in it, such as anger, indignation, and

resentment, are evidently far stronger than those which have reference to friendly objects ; and if any of these strong passions are frequently excited by opposition, they infuse a certain quality into the general temperament of the mind, which remains after the immediate excitement is past. They continually strengthen the principle of re-action ; they put the mind in the habitual array of defence and self-assertion, and often give it the aspect and the posture of a gladiator, when there appears no confronting combatant. When these passions are provoked in such a person as I describe, it is probable that each excitement is followed by a greater increase of this principle of re-action than in other men, because this result is so congenial with his naturally resolute disposition. Let him be opposed then, throughout the prosecution of one of his designs, or in the general tenour of his actions, and this constant opposition would render him the service of an ally, by augmenting the resisting and defying power of his mind. An irresolute spirit indeed might be quelled and subjugated by a formidable and persisting opposition ; but the strong wind which blows out a taper, exasperates a powerful fire (if there be fuel enough) to an indefinite intensity. It would be found, in fact, on a recollection of instances, that many of the persons most conspicuous for decision, have been exercised and forced to this high tone of spirit in having to make their way through opposition and contest ; a discipline under which they were wrought to both a prompt acuteness of faculty, and an inflexibility of temper, hardly attainable even by minds of great natural strength, if brought forward into the affairs of life under indulgent auspices, and in habits of easy and friendly coincidence with those around them. Often, however, it is granted, the firmness matured by such discipline is, in a man of virtue, accompanied with a Catonic* severity, and in a mere man of the world is an unhumanized repulsive hardness.

Desertion may be another cause conducive to the consolidation of this character. A kind mutually reclining dependence, is certainly for the happiness of human beings ; but this necessarily prevents the development of some great individual powers which would be forced into action by a state of abandonment. I lately happened to notice, with some surprise, an ivy, which, finding nothing to cling to beyond a certain point, had shot off into a bold elastic stem, with an air of as much independence as any branch of oak in the vicinity. So a human being thrown, whether by cruelty, justice, or accident, from all social support and kindness, if he have any vigour of spirit, and be not in the bodily debility of either childhood or age, will begin to act for himself with a resolution which will appear like a new faculty. And the most absolute inflexibility is likely to characterize the resolution of an individual who is obliged to deliberate

* Cato the Censor, a Roman noted for his severity. He died 185 B.C.

without consultation, and execute without assistance. He will disdain to yield to beings who have rejected him, or to forego a particle of his designs or advantages in concession to the opinions or the will of all the world. Himself, his pursuits, and his interests, are emphatically his own. "The world is not his friend, nor the world's law;" and therefore he becomes regardless of every thing but its power, of which his policy carefully takes the measure, in order to ascertain his own means of action and impunity, as set against the world's means of annoyance, prevention, and retaliation.

■ If this person have but little humanity or principle, he will become a misanthrope, or perhaps a villain, who will resemble a solitary wild beast of the night, which makes prey of every thing it can overpower, and cares for nothing but fire. If he be capable of grand conception and enterprise, he may, like Spartacus,* make a daring attempt against the whole social order of the state where he has been oppressed. If he be of great humanity and principle, he may become one of the noblest of mankind, and display a generous virtue to which society had no claim, and which it is not worthy to reward, if it should at last become inclined. No, he will say, give your rewards to another; as it has been no part of my object to gain them, they are not necessary to my satisfaction. I have done good, without expecting your gratitude, and without caring for your approbation. If conscience and my Creator had not been more auspicious than you, none of these virtues would ever have opened to the day. When I ought to have been an object of your compassion, I might have perished; now, when you find I can serve your interests, you will affect to acknowledge me and reward me; but I will abide by my destiny to verify the principle that virtue is its own reward.—In either case, virtuous or wicked, the man who has been compelled to do without assistance, will spurn interference.

Common life would supply illustrations of the effect of desertion, in examples of some of the most resolute men having become such partly from being left friendless in early life. The case has also sometimes happened, that a wife and mother, remarkable perhaps for gentleness and acquiescence before, has been compelled, after the death of her husband on whom she depended, and when she has met with nothing but neglect or unkindness from relations and those who had been accounted friends, to adopt a plan of her own, and has executed it with a resolution which has astonished even herself.

One regrets that the signal examples, real or fictitious, that most readily present themselves, are still of the depraved order. I fancy myself to see Marius† sitting on the ruins of Carthage, where no arch

* The leader in the great insurrection of Roman slaves in Southern Italy which took place 73 B.C.

† A celebrated Roman who fled for safety to Africa. The ruins of Carthage reminded him of his own misfortunes. He returned to Rome to take terrible vengeance on his enemies, but he died soon afterwards, 86 B.C.

or column, that remained unshaken amidst the desolation, could present a stronger image of a firmness beyond the power of disaster to subdue. The rigid constancy which had before distinguished his character, would be aggravated by his finding himself thus an outcast from all human society; and he would proudly shake off every sentiment that had ever for an instant checked his designs in the way of reminding him of social obligations. The lonely individual was placed in the alternative of becoming the victim or the antagonist of the power of the empire. While, with a spirit capable of confronting that power, he resolved, amidst those ruins, on a great experiment, he would enjoy a kind of sullen luxury in surveying the dreary situation into which he was driven, and recollecting the circumstances of his expulsion; since they would seem to him to sanction an unlimited vengeance; to present what had been his country as the pure legitimate prize for desperate achievement; and to give him a proud consequence in being reduced to maintain singly a mortal quarrel against the bulk of mankind. He would exult that the very desolation of his condition rendered but the more complete the proof of his possessing a mind which no misfortunes could repress or intimidate, and that it kindled an animosity intense enough to force that mind from firm endurance into impetuous action. He would feel that he became stronger for enterprise, in proportion as his exile and destitution rendered him more inexorable; and the sentiment with which he quitted his solitude would be,—Rome expelled her patriot, let her receive her evil genius.

The decision of Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, is represented as consolidated by his reflections on his hopeless banishment from heaven, which oppress him with sadness for some moments, but he soon resumes his invincible spirit, and utters the impious but sublime sentiment,

“What matter where, if I be still the same?”

You remember how this effect of desertion is represented in Charles de Moor.* His father's supposed cruel rejection consigned him irretrievably to the career of atrocious enterprise, in which, notwithstanding the most interesting emotions of humanity and tenderness, he persisted with heroic determination till he considered his destiny as accomplished.

Success tends considerably to reinforce this commanding quality. It is true that a man possessing it in a high degree will not lose it by occasional failure; for if the failure was caused by something entirely beyond the reach of human knowledge and ability, he will remember that fortitude is the virtue required in meeting unfavourable events which in no sense depended on him; if by something

* A wildly extravagant, certainly, but most imposing and gigantic character in Schiller's tragedy, *The Robbers*.

which *might* have been known and prevented, he will feel that even the experience of failure completes his competence, by admonishing his prudence, and enlarging his understanding. But as schemes and measures of action rightly adjusted to their proposed ends will generally attain them, continual failure would show something essentially wrong in a man's system, and destroy his confidence, or else expose it as mere absurdity or obstinacy. On the contrary, when a man has ascertained by experiment the justness of his calculations and the extent of his powers, when he has measured his force with various persons, when he has braved and vanquished difficulty, and partly seized the prize, he will carry forward the result of all this in an intrepid self-sufficiency for whatever may yet await him.

In some men, whose lives have been spent in constant perils, continued success has produced a confidence beyond its rational effect, by inspiring a presumption that the common laws of human affairs were, in their case, superseded by the decrees of a peculiar destiny, securing them from almost the possibility of disaster; and this superstitious feeling, though it has displaced the unconquerable resolution from its rational basis, has often produced the most wonderful effects. This dictated Cæsar's expression to the mariner who was terrified at the storm and billows, "What art thou afraid of?—thy vessel carries Cæsar." The brave men in the times of the English Commonwealth* were, some of them, indebted in a degree for their magnanimity to this idea of a special destination, entertained as a religious sentiment.

The wilfulness of an obstinate person is sometimes fortified by some single instance of remarkable success in his undertakings, which is promptly recalled in every case where his decisions are questioned or opposed, as a proof, or ground of just presumption, that he must in this instance too be right; especially if that one success happened contrary to your predictions.

I shall only add, and without illustration, that the habit of associating with *inferiors*, among whom a man can always, and therefore does always, take the precedence and give the law, is conducive to a subordinate coarse kind of decision of character. You may see this exemplified any day in an ignorant country squire among his vassals; especially if he wear the lordly superaddition of Justice of the Peace.

In viewing the characters and actions of the men who have possessed in imperial eminence the quality which I have attempted to describe, one cannot but wish it were possible to know how much of this mighty superiority was created by the circumstances in which they were placed; but it is inevitable to believe that there was some vast intrinsic difference from ordinary men in the original

* Oliver Cromwell, John Hampden, and others.

constitutional structure of the mind. In observing lately a man who appeared too vacant almost to think of a purpose, too indifferent to resolve upon it, and too sluggish to execute it if he had resolved, I was distinctly struck with the idea of the distance between him and Marius, of whom I happened to have been reading ; and it was infinitely beyond my power to believe that any circumstances on earth, though ever so perfectly combined and adapted, would have produced in this man, if placed under their fullest influence from his childhood, any resemblance (unless perhaps the courage to enact a diminutive imitation in revenge and cruelty) of the formidable Roman.

It is needless to discuss whether a person who is practically evinced, at the age of maturity, to want the stamina of this character, can, by any process, acquire it. Indeed such a person cannot have sufficient force of *will* to make the complete experiment. If there were the unconquerable *will* that would persist to seize all possible means, and apply them in order to attain, if I may so express it, this stronger mode of active existence, it would prove the possession already of a high degree of the character sought ; and if there is not this *will*, how then is the supposed attainment possible ?

Yet though it is improbable that a very irresolute man can ever become a habitually decisive one, it should be observed, that since there are *degrees* of this powerful quality, and since the essential principles of it, when partially existing in those degrees, cannot be supposed subject to definite and ultimate limitation, like the dimension of the bodily stature, it might be possible to apply a discipline which should advance a man from the lowest degree to the next, from that to the third, and how much further—it will be worth his trying, if his first successful experiments have not cost more in the efforts for making the attainment, than he judges likely to be repaid by any good he shall gain from its exercise. I have but a very imperfect conception of the discipline ; but will suggest a hint or two.

In the first place, the indispensable necessity of a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the concerns before us, seems too obvious for remark ; and yet no man has been sufficiently sensible of it, till he has been placed in circumstances which forced him to act before he had time, or after he had made ineffectual efforts, to obtain the needful information and understanding. The pain of having brought things to an unfortunate issue, is hardly greater than that of proceeding in the conscious ignorance which continually threatens such an issue. While thus proceeding at hazard, under some compulsion which makes it impossible for him to remain in inaction, a man looks round for information as eagerly as a benighted wanderer would for the light of a human dwelling. He perhaps labours to recall what he thinks he once heard or read as relating to a similar situation, without dreaming at that time that such instruction could

ever come to be of importance to him ; and is distressed to find his best recollection so indistinct as to be useless. He would give a considerable sum, if some particular book could be brought to him at the instant ; or a certain document which he believes to be in existence ; or the detail of a process, the terms of a prescription, or the model of an implement. He thinks how many people know, without its being of any present use to them, exactly what could be of such important service to him, if he could know it. In some cases, a line, a sentence, a monosyllable of affirming or denying, or a momentary sight of an object, would be inexpressibly valuable and welcome. And he resolves that if he can once happily escape from the present difficulty, he will apply himself day and night to obtain knowledge, not concerning one particular matter only, but divers others, in provision against possible emergencies, rather than be so involved and harassed again. It might really be of service to have been occasionally forced to act under the disadvantage of conscious ignorance (if the affair was not so important as to allow the consequence to be very injurious), as an effectual lesson on the necessity of knowledge in order to decision either of plan or execution. It must indeed be an extreme case that will compel a considerate man to act in the absence of knowledge ; yet he may sometimes be necessitated to proceed to action, when he is sensible his information is far from extending to the whole of the concern in which he is going to commit himself. And in this case, he will feel no little uneasiness, while transacting that part of it in which his knowledge is competent, when he looks forward to the point where that knowledge terminates ; unless he be conscious of possessing an exceedingly prompt faculty of catching information at the moment that he wants it for use ; as Indians set out on a long journey with but a trifling stock of provision, because they are sure that their bows or guns will procure it by the way. It is one of the nicest points of wisdom to decide how much less than complete knowledge, in any question of practical interest, will warrant a man to venture on an undertaking, in the presumption that the deficiency will be supplied in time to prevent either perplexity or disaster.

A thousand familiar instances show the effect of complete knowledge on determination. An artisan may be said to be decisive as to the mode of working a piece of iron or wood, because he is certain of the proper process and the effect. A man perfectly acquainted with the intricate paths of a woodland district, takes the right one without a moment's hesitation ; while a stranger, who has only some very vague information, is lost in perplexity. It is easy to imagine what a number of circumstances may occur in the course of life, or even of a year, in which a man cannot thus readily determine, and thus confidently proceed without a compass and an exactness of knowledge which few persons have application

enough to acquire. And it would be frightful to know to what extent human interests are committed to the direction of ignorance. What a consolatory doctrine is that of a particular Providence !

In connexion with the necessity of knowledge, I would suggest the importance of cultivating, with the utmost industry, a conclusive manner of thinking. In the first place, let the general course of thinking partake of the nature of *reasoning*; and let it be remembered that this name does not belong to a series of thoughts and fancies which follow one another without deduction or dependence, and which can therefore no more bring a subject to a proper issue, than a number of separate links will answer the mechanical purpose of a chain. The conclusion which terminates such a series, does not deserve the name of *result* or *conclusion*, since it has little more than a casual connexion with what went before; the conclusion might as properly have taken place at an earlier point of the train, or have been deferred till that train had been extended much further. Instead of having been busily employed in this kind of thinking, for perhaps many hours, a man might possibly as well have been sleeping all the time; since the single thought which is now to determine his conduct, might have happened to be the first thought that occurred to him on awaking. It only *happens* to occur to him now; it does not follow from what he has been thinking these hours; at least, he cannot prove that some other thought might not just as appropriately have come in its place at the end, and to make an end, of this long series. It is easy to see how feeble that determination is likely to be, which is formed on so narrow a ground as the last accidental idea that comes into the mind, or on so loose a ground as this crude uncombined assemblage of ideas. Indeed it is difficult to form a determination at all on such slight ground. A man delays, and waits for some more satisfactory thought to occur to him; and perhaps he has not waited long, before an idea arises in his mind of a quite contrary tendency to the last. As this additional idea is not, more than that which preceded it, the result of any process of reasoning, nor brings with it any arguments, it may be expected to give place soon to another, and still another; and they are all in succession of equal authority, that is properly of none. If at last an idea occurs to him which seems of considerable authority, he may here make a stand, and adopt his resolution, with firmness, as he thinks, and commence the execution. But still, if he cannot see *whence* the principle which has determined him derives its authority—on what it holds for that authority—his resolution is likely to prove treacherous and evanescent in any serious trial. A principle so little verified by sound reasoning, is not *terra firma* for a man to trust himself upon; it is only as a slight incrustation on a yielding element; it is like the sand compacted into a

thin surface on the lake Serbonis,* which broke away under the unfortunate army which had begun to advance on it, mistaking it for solid ground.—These remarks may seem to refer only to a *single instance* of deliberation; but they are equally applicable to all the deliberations and undertakings of a man's life; the same connected manner of thinking, which is so necessary to give firmness of determination and of conduct in a particular instance, will, if habitual, greatly contribute to form a decisive character.

Not only should thinking be thus reduced, by a strong and patient discipline, to a train or process, in which all the parts at once depend upon and support one another, but also this train should be followed on to a full conclusion. It should be held as a law generally in force, that the question must be disposed of before it is let alone. The mind may carry on this accurate process to some length, and then stop through indolence, or start away through levity; but it can never possess that rational confidence in its opinions which is requisite to the character in question, till it is conscious of acquiring them from an exercise of thought continued on to its result. The habit of thinking thus completely is indispensable to the general character of decision; and in any particular instance, it is found that short pieces of courses of reasoning, though correct as far as they go, are inadequate to make a man master of the immediate concern. They are besides of little value for aid to future thinking; because from being left thus incomplete they are but slightly retained by the mind, and soon sink away; in the same manner as the walls of a structure left unfinished speedily moulder.

After these remarks, I should take occasion to observe, that a vigorous exercise of thought may sometimes for a while seem to increase the difficulty of decision, by discovering a great number of unthought-of reasons for a measure and against it, so that the most discriminating mind may, during a short space, find itself in the state of the magnetic needle under the equator. But no case in the world can really have a perfect equality of opposite reasons; nor will it long appear to have it, in the estimate of a clear and well-disciplined intellect, which after some time will ascertain, though the difference is small, which side of the question has ten, and which has but nine. At any rate this is the mind to come nearest in the approximation.

Another thing that would powerfully assist toward complete decision, both in the particular instance, and in the general spirit of the character, is for a man to place himself in a situation analogous to that in which Cæsar placed his soldiers, when he burnt the ships† which brought them to land. If his judgment is *really* decided, let him commit himself irretrievably, by doing something which shall oblige him to do more, which shall lay on him the necessity of

* Between Egypt and Palestine.

† When he landed in Britain, 54 B.C.

doing all. If a man resolves as a general intention to be a philanthropist, I would say to him, Form some actual plan of philanthropy, and begin the execution of it to-morrow, (if I may not say *to-day*,) so explicitly that you cannot relinquish it without becoming degraded even in your own estimation. If a man would be a hero, let him, if it be possible to find a good cause in arms, go presently to the camp. If a man is desirous of a travelling adventure through distant countries, and deliberately approves both his purpose and his scheme, let him actually prepare to set off. Let him not still dwell, in imagination, on mountains, rivers, and temples; but give directions about his remittances, his personal equipments, or the carriage, or the vessel, in which he is to go. Ledyard surprised the official person who asked him how soon he could be ready to set off for the interior of Africa, by replying promptly and firmly, "To-morrow."

Again, it is highly conducive to a manly firmness, that the interests in which it is exerted should be of a dignified order, so as to give the passions an ample scope, and a noble object. The degradation they suffer in being devoted to mean and trivial pursuits, often perceived to be such in spite of every fallacy of the imagination, would in general, I should think, also debilitate their energy, and therefore preclude strength of character, to which nothing can be more adverse, than to have the fire of the passions damped by the mortification of feeling contempt for the object, as often as its meanness is betrayed by failure of the delusion which invests it.

And finally, I would repeat that one should think a man's own conscientious approbation of his conduct must be of vast importance to his decision in the outset, and his persevering constancy; and I would attribute it to defect of memory that a greater proportion of the examples, introduced for illustration in this essay, do not exhibit goodness in union with the moral and intellectual power so conspicuous in the quality described. Certainly a bright constellation of such examples might be displayed; yet it is the mortifying truth that much the greater number of men pre-eminent for decision, have been such as could not have their own serious approbation, except through an utter perversion of judgment or abolition of conscience. And it is melancholy to contemplate beings represented in our imagination as of adequate power, (when they possessed great external means to give effect to the force of their minds,) for the grandest utility, for vindicating each good cause which has languished in a world adverse to all goodness, and for intimidating collective vices of a nation or an age—to contemplate such beings as becoming themselves the mighty exemplars, giants, and champions of those vices; and it is fearful to follow them in thought, from this region, of which not all the powers and difficulties and inhabitants together could have subdued their adamant resolution,

to the Supreme Tribunal* where that resolution must tremble and melt away.

MORAL COURAGE :

ITS NEED IN INDIA, AND THE SOURCE WHENCE

IT IS TO BE OBTAINED.

* **National Characteristics.**—Every nation has, more or less, its distinguishing features of character; its excellencies and its defects. The English are noted for their courage and enterprise. Their vast empire is a proof of this. Webster, a distinguished American statesman, says of Great Britain, that it is

“A power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.”

On the other hand, it must be admitted, as Lord Canning remarked, “that the very virtues of the English are not seldom exaggerated into faults.” As a nation, they are inclined to be proud, and not sufficiently conciliatory.

The people of India are, in some respects, the opposite of the English. Firmness is wanting. *Speculation* rather than *action* is the leading feature. The spirit of enterprise was quenched and a stationary civilization produced by declaring any one who crossed the “black waters” an outcaste. But the Hindus shine in the gentler graces of character, in which the English are often deficient.

It is the duty, both of individuals and nations, to seek to acquire the virtues in which they are lacking, and to free themselves from the faults with which they are justly chargeable.

As this paper is intended for circulation among Indians, the remarks refer to them.

Need of Moral Courage in India.—By moral courage is meant acting up to one's convictions of what is right in spite of opposition of any kind. It is needed everywhere, but especially so in this country. The Rev. W. Stevenson, late of Madras, says:—

“The grand characteristic of Hindu society is just its despotic character; its customs and ordinances are so rigid and unbending that no freedom is allowed to the individual. On every side he is hedged in by regulations and prescriptions, so that he can only walk in the narrow rut which these lay down for him. As a necessary consequence, the grand characteristic of the individual Hindu is his want of individuality—his want of a sense of personal responsibility and capability for independent

* God's Judgment Throne.

thought and action. The family, the community, the whole social organism, is so prominent, so exacting, so absolute, that the individual in comparison is nothing."

Maine's *Ancient Law* explains it. Hindu society is still in the patriarchal stage. "The unit of an ancient society was the family; of a modern society, the individual."

The following remarks by Bishop Caldwell contain much truth :—

"Practically it matters very little in general what theosophy or philosophy a Hindu professes, what his ideas may be about the most ancient form of his religion, or even what his ideas may be about the religious reforms that the age is said to require. As a matter of fact, and in so far as his actual course in life is concerned, he is content, except in a small number of exceptional cases, to adhere with scrupulous care to the traditional usages of his caste and sect. His ideas may have received a tincture from his English education, but ordinarily his actions differ in no particular of any importance from those of his progenitors."

A few examples will now be given of the evils to which educated men in India submit from want of moral courage :—

1. **Early Marriages.**—The custom of child marriage is almost peculiar to India. The rule in other parts of the world is that marriages should not be contracted till both parties attain adult age. Intelligent, thoughtful persons do not marry till there is a prospect of their being able to support a family. Foresight in this respect conduces to the happiness of a nation, while recklessness must lead to misery.

Professor Runganatha Mudaliyar, of Madras, says :—

"I may feel that the best thing I can do for my stupid son is to keep him single, until such time at least as he is able to shift for himself and earns enough to maintain a wife and children with; but such is the tyranny of custom that he must be married as soon as he arrives at man's estate, even though I have the burden of supporting, it may be to the last day of my life, my worthless son and his wife and all the creatures that they may bring into existence."

2. **Extravagant Expenditure at Marriages.**—This is one great cause of poverty and indebtedness in India.

The Rev. W. Stevenson describes as follows a common marriage case :—

"A father is about to get his daughter married; his income is Rs. 50 a month, and he has saved nothing; but it is the custom for one in his position to spend Rs. 500. He knows he hasn't got the means; he must borrow at exorbitant interest, he must put a load of debt on his shoulders, which may grind him down for long years; but what does he do? Does he say honestly—Well, I haven't got the money, it is wrong and foolish to burden myself with debt; I'll only spend what I can properly afford, and mind nothing else? No, he says, 'What can I do, Sir? It's our

custom, and if I don't spend all this money, my neighbours will put shame on me.' So he foolishly and cowardly puts his neck under the yoke, rather than face a breath of popular opinion."

3. **The Bondage of Caste.**—There was no caste among the early Aryans before they came to India. In Vedic times there were two divisions—the fair Aryans and the dark aborigines. Different employments led to four divisions, but in course of time these have been endlessly multiplied. Brahmans now form ten tribes with no fewer than 1886 subdivisions. Many of these subdivisions will no more eat, drink, and intermarry with one another than they will with the other castes. A single caste in Madras, the Mudaliyars, is divided into as many as fifty sections. Even the Pariahs have numerous subdivisions, and are as tenacious of their caste as the highest Brahmans.

Mr. Sherring has the following remarks on caste :—

"Caste surrounds the Indian from the day of his birth to that of his death....By day and by night, at home or abroad, in waking, sleeping, eating, drinking, in all the customs of the society in which he moves, and in the events governing his entire life, he is always under its pervading and overmastering influence. Hindus are tied hand and foot, and are willing slaves of the most intolerant and exacting taskmaster that ever placed a yoke on the neck of man."

The *Indian Nation*, a Native paper, in noticing Mr. Cotton's apology for caste, says,

"No code of jail discipline could be more comprehensive or severe than the Hindu religion on its practical side."

Pandit Shiva Nath Sastri thus enumerates some of its evils :—

(1) It has produced disunion and discord. (2) It has made honest manual labour contemptible in this country. (3) It has checked internal and external commerce. (4) It has brought on physical degeneracy by confining marriage within narrow circles. (5) It has been a source of conservatism in every thing. (6) It has suppressed the development of individuality and independence of character. (7) It has helped in developing other injurious customs, such as early marriage, the charging of heavy matrimonial fees, &c. (8) It has successfully restrained the growth and development of national worth; whilst allowing opportunity of mental and spiritual culture only to a limited number of privileged people, it has denied these opportunities to the majority of the lower classes, consequently it has made the country negatively a loser. (9) It has made the country fit for foreign slavery by previously enslaving the people by the most abject spiritual tyranny.

Caste carries out its own childish rules and laws with Draconian severity, while it disregards the greatest crimes. A man may be guilty of dakoity and murder; this does not affect his caste; but let him take a glass of water from a European, and it is imme-

diately destroyed. "Other religions," it has been remarked, "may be seated in the mind and soul,—but the stronghold of Hinduism is the stomach." The most important distinctions between right and wrong are obliterated by caste.

That the ignorant should cling to caste, is only what might be expected; but it is humiliating that some men who ought to be the leaders of enlightened public opinion bend their necks to its yoke. A recent instance may be noticed.

Amrita Lal Roy visited different parts of England, and afterwards resided three years in the United States, which he regards as the "hub of creation," and where he "was rewarded with friendship and esteem by some of the most intelligent Americans." Tell it not in the streets of New York, publish it not in the pages of the *North American Review*, that this gentleman, after enjoying such advantages, on his return to Calcutta was purified from contact with unclean Mlechhas by swallowing a pill made of the five products of the cow,* and was received again into caste. "It sounds odd," says *The Liberal*, "that a person who has eaten no end of cows should finish by showing his veneration for the same animal by swallowing dung-cakes."

The worst feature of the case is that an influential Bengali newspaper, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, regards Mr. Roy as having "shown an amount of heroism which ought to form an example to those impious wretches who rebel against the laws and customs of their own country. After a keen observation of several years he comes home, and he prefers his superstition and idolatry to all that he had seen in the so-called enlightened countries of the world. This is a fact, which ought to give some food for reflection."

The remark was made: "We agree that this does afford 'food for reflection,' in illustrating how possible it is even for men claiming respectability, to debase themselves before the whole world, and for them and their friends to glory in their shame."

It would be unfair not to give other Native comments on such proceedings. The following quotation had reference to another case, but the principle is the same.

The *Hindu Patriot*, the leading Native paper, while under the editorship of the late Hon. Kristo Das Pal, remarked:—

"As Indians, we should feel humiliated to see any one of our fellow-Indians, with silly caste-notions in his head, travelling to Europe—especially, when the traveller pretends to represent the rising and educated classes of this great continent. We do not wish people in England, in Europe, to believe that what we call 'education' has not yet freed our intellects from the trammels of superstition; that we are afraid even to drink a glass of pure water from the hands of an Englishman, lest

* Milk, curds, ghee, urine, and dung.

the recording angel should make a damning entry against us in his books ! India can never be regenerated till she has outlived the oppressive institution of caste ; and she can never outlive the oppressive system of caste, if we are to look to men like who begins like a daring rebel, but ends into an imbecile swallower of penitential pills !”

The Indian Reformer, about the same time, used still stronger language :—

“ We sicken at the sight. We are weary of moral worthlessness and cowardice. When will India be reformed if her foremost sons thus ignominiously allow themselves to be bound by the fetters of custom—thus tamely submit to the dictation of ignorance, of priestcraft, and of folly ? These men will surely do no good to their country. We require men of braver hearts, of greater moral courage, of a holier earnestness, of a more heroic determination ; of a diviner faith.”

It should also be mentioned that some Indians, on their return from England, have not acted the part of the poltroon like Mr. Roy.

Caste has hitherto been the great obstacle to national unity. The late Congresses are both a sign of progress and a powerful agency for the destruction of the system.

Every true Indian patriot must echo the following prayer in the *Indu Prakash*:—

“ Oh God, have mercy on our fallen-countrymen ! Give them true knowledge of thy Fatherhood, and their brotherhood ; that our countless millions may be bound by one social tie, and joining hand with hand, and heart with heart, move onward in the path of freedom and righteousness, knowledge and glory, and national regeneration.”

4. **Conforming to Idolatry.**—Of India it may be said “ The land is full of idols.” Nearly every Hindu home has its idol before which worship is paid.

Many educated Hindus take part in idolatrous rites, pretending that they are harmless customs, kept up by female influence, and that they conform to them simply to avoid giving offence.

Is idolatry a harmless custom ? Professor Monier Williams thus describes the effect produced upon himself by a Hindu festival in the Madras Presidency :—

“ No sight in India made me more sick at heart than this. It furnished a sad example of the utterly debasing character of the idolatry, which, notwithstanding the counteracting influences of education and Christianity, still enslaves the masses of the population, deadening their intellects, corrupting their imaginations, warping their affections, perverting their consciences, and disfiguring the fair soil of a beautiful country with hideous images and practices unsanctioned even by their own most sacred works.”*

* Religious Thought in India, p. 443.

The one true God is the Creator of this world and its rightful Lord. The worship of any other than Himself is high treason against His authority. To worship Him under the form of images is degrading to Him. "To whom will ye liken me or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One."

The excuse that women and ignorant people require images to assist them in worshipping God is groundless. A loving child does not require an image to make him remember his father, even when he is far distant.

The desire to please parents and relatives, within proper limits, is a praiseworthy feeling; but to break God's first and great command at the wish of any human being is a plea which cannot be sustained for a moment. Suppose a parallel case. Parents urge a son to take part in a robbery; they will be vexed if he does not consent. Would a judge accept such an excuse? Would it be true kindness to his parents to join them in such an act? Is he not rather bound, not only to abstain entirely from any participation in the crime, but to do his utmost to dissuade his parents from engaging in it? It would be great cruelty to behave otherwise.

An educated Hindu taking part in idolatrous ceremonies violates his conscience, is guilty of rebellion against God's authority, and is aiding to prolong the reign of superstition.

Some say that they worship the one true God under the name of Vishnu or Siva. In speaking we are bound to use words in their ordinary sense. It is well-known what Hindus understand by Vishnu or Siva, and to mean something entirely different is fraud. The God of truth is not to be worshipped by hypocrisy. A man is not to deny God by *appearing* a Hindu, when he believes Hinduism to be false.

Philosophers among the ancient Greeks and Romans condemned polytheism, but they outwardly conformed to the national creed. The people remained as zealous idolaters as ever. The early Christians separated themselves entirely; and soon the idol temples were deserted. Reformation is impossible if all adhere to old customs.

Women are the chief supporters of idolatry in India. Poor creatures they do not know better. Those who are mainly responsible for it and to be blamed are the educated men, who by their example encourage them in error. The women of India are naturally both intelligent and affectionate. If their husbands, instead of behaving as at present, would lovingly teach them to worship their great Father in heaven instead of idols, the reign of superstition would soon come to an end. The change is so reasonable as easily to be understood. It is so simple that it may be made intelligible even to a child.

It is vain to boast of the pretended civilization of a country with 33

crores of gods and goddesses. All that can be truly said of its people is that they rank higher than the fetish worshippers of Africa.

Whatever may be the Hindu *ideal* of duty, the *practice*, with some noble exceptions, will be found in the words, "Obedience to caste is the whole duty of man."

Proposed Methods of Reform.—Many educated men, who conform to usages which they condemn, would be glad to see them changed. The way in which they hope this is to be effected is thus described by the Rev. W. Stevenson:—

"The evil customs and practices pervade the whole society of which they form a part, and they do not profess to be exempt from them. But they want to have them reformed,—only they must have every body reformed all at once, the whole society ought to make one simultaneous movement and at one grand moment throw off the yoke together. So they must wait till every one is ready, none must make any step before all the rest; the whole community must as one body achieve the reform, the individual must just remain quiet until he finds himself free. You observe that in this case too the would-be reformers do not find it necessary to set about reforming themselves; it is society they are anxious to operate on; for themselves first and chiefly they do not feel called upon to undertake the unpleasant task. If only society could be put right! if by a stroke of some magic wand all its evil customs and practices could be made to disappear, and a new constitution take their place, what a glorious change it would be for the enlightened! They are dissatisfied with the present state of things and would like to see them improved. If only society could be put right! But there's the difficulty, a difficulty we can see no happy way of getting over. If the individuals are all to remain the same, it is beyond our weak powers to see how the society is to be changed. For we don't know of any society which is not composed of individuals; and to make the whole move while every part remains where it was, does not appear an easy task. Given the problem:—how to make a railway train pass from Madras to Bangalore, while every wheel stands still—it will puzzle most to find a solution."

Mr. R. N. Choy, of Surat, thus notices a second method:—

"Another section of Native gentlemen acknowledging the social evils, are ever ready with 'prudent' arguments and quotations from English writers and philosophers. These men will argue that the evils are the result of a thousand years of priestcraft and ignorance. They are incurable. Drastic measures won't do. They should be left to education, to female education, to be reformed in course of time. We should mind political progress. If we took any violent steps, we should produce a strong reaction in the mind of the community. And all the rest in the same strain. There is, perhaps, no cause so bad that argument cannot be found to justify it. *But I solemnly declare from personal experience* that half a dozen of these friends of reform, especially if they be men of light and leading in the community, do, by their 'prudent' counsels, far more to retard it than a hundred begging Brahmins are able to do. . . . When

the race can produce leaders who only talk of prudence and quote authors without having the courage to put their doctrines into practice, that race is past all hope. It can never achieve independence. It must ever remain in servility to one foreign master or another.”*

Political Reform is very popular. The *Indian Messenger* thus explains why some of its advocates take no interest in social reform, and points out their inconsistencies :—

“ But the true reason of their backwardness in point of social reform is perhaps to be found in the fact that social reform always involves some amount of self-sacrifice. One must necessarily incur the displeasure of those who are wedded to the old state of things, and perhaps must bring down upon himself, its consequence, some social disadvantages. Ah there is the rub ! These devotees of social comfort are for regenerating their country *in the line of the least resistance*. And as politics evokes least *resistance*, and costs a man nothing more than words, speeches and harangues, it finds many sympathisers amongst our educated men. Thus there is this anomaly that those who would not give the lower castes the right to sit and dine with them, would clamour against the Anglo-Indians if the latter refuse to travel in the same carriage with natives ; those who refuse to grant the blessings of education and social emancipation to their women, are clamouring for representative institutions and elective systems ; those who are not prepared to give their children the freedom to choose their own partners in life, are yet crying for unbounded freedom of speech and action, at the hands of a foreign Government ! Without further ceremony, and without even an attempt for courtesy, we must directly tell these advocates of cheap patriotism, that we look down upon their enthusiasm for the political regeneration of the country with contempt. First be *men*, then *statesmen* ! ” January 2, 1887.

While political and social reform are useful in their place, it will be shown that a far deeper change is necessary for the regeneration of India.

Need of Individual Example.—Mill, in his book “ On Liberty,” describes “ the masses ” as “ collective mediocrity.” “ The initiation of all wise or noble things,” he says, “ comes, and must come, from individuals—generally at first from some one individual. The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiation ; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open...In this age, the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service.”

There can never be a reformation in any country if the leaders follow the masses, instead of setting them an example. Speechifying

* Quoted in *The Interpreter*, August, 1886.

without practice is valueless. A Native paper thus describes some Indian reformers :—

“ A Demosthenes at Debating Societies, whose words tell as peals of thunder, a Luther in his public protestations against prevailing corruptions, a thorough-going Cockney in ideas and tastes, he is but a timid crouching Hindu in his home, yielding unquestioning submission to the requisitions of a superstitious family.”

Rule of Conduct.—To follow custom is a very unsafe guide. Such a principle would justify lying and filthy speech, unhappily so common. It is custom which sanctions child-marriage, which dooms widows to a life of wretchedness, which forges the chains of caste, and perpetuates idolatry. God’s command is, “ Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” If we do so, we must, with them, suffer the consequences.

Our conduct should be regulated by a *sense of Duty*, or a regard to what is right in itself. The voice within us, approving or condemning our actions, is called *conscience*.

To act against our conscience—to do what we consider wrong—is always blameworthy. If a man considers an action wrong and yet does it, *to him* it is wrong, although in itself it may be innocent. To act according to our conscience—to do what we think right—is not always right. An Indian thug murdered his victims without compunction.

Conscience must be *enlightened*. We should do all in our power to arrive at true views of things, and then act.

A sense of individual responsibility, of the supremacy of conscience, is one of the most important lessons a Hindu has to learn.

Strength for Duty.—Men, as a rule, know what is right. What is wanted is a motive strong enough to enable them to resist the seductions to an opposite course. In most, the love of money, pleasure, or honour is the ruling passion. In some the contending forces are somewhat balanced, leading to *trimmers*. Only a few have the courage to pursue the path of duty.

It is of vital consequence to ascertain how we may be enabled to follow out our convictions of what is right.

The careful study of Foster’s Essay on *Decision of Character* is recommended. Among the requisites to attain some measure of this quality of mind, he mentions clear knowledge, conclusive thinking, taking a decided step, a noble object, and the approval of conscience. All these are useful in their place, but two others may be mentioned.

Placing a noble example before us for imitation.—The powerful influence of a father or mother is well known. Teachers, like the late Dr. Arnold of Rugby, have infused their spirit into their pupils. Buddhism numbers so many followers largely through the personal

character attributed to Sakya Muni. But unquestionably "Jesus Christ is the most powerful force that has ever moulded the thought and swayed the destinies of civilized men." Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, thus shows the effect of Christ's life:—

"It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world a character, which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries, has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice; and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists." *

J. S. Mill expresses the following opinion of the Founder of Christianity:—

"About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching upon this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life." *

Let the reader study the life of Christ as given in the New Testament, and seek to copy His example.

One remark may be made. Fault has been found with Christ's stern denunciation of hypocrisy and other sins. According to philosophic Hinduism, it is the highest attainment of character to regard good and evil with equal eye. But as *The Indian Messenger* justly remarks, "When there is no hatred of untruth, no indignation for any conduct that is dishonest and untruthful, there is no real love of truth."

Dependence on Divine Strength.—True reform in India is not to be achieved under the banner of atheism. Men who march under it are very unsafe guides. The maxim should be,

"Trust in God and do the right."

It has often been remarked that the tendency of Hinduism has been downwards. The "thrice eleven divinities" of the Vedas have been multiplied into 33 crores. Caste and the evils against which social reformers are contending, find no support on the Vedas.

The oldest Aryan creed was evidently monotheistic, the worship of one God. The following remarks by Max Müller deserve careful consideration :—

“There is a monotheism which precedes the polytheism of the Veda, and even in the invocation of their innumerable gods, the remembrance of a God, one and infinite, breaks through the midst of an idolatrous phraseology, like the blue sky that is hidden by passing clouds.”

“Thousands of years have passed since the Aryan nations separated to travel to the North and the South, the West and the East : they have each formed their languages, they have each founded empires and philosophies, they have each built temples and razed them to the ground ; they have all grown older, and it may be wiser and better ; but when they search for a name for what is most exalted and yet most dear to every one of us, when they wish to express both awe and love, the infinite and finite, they can but do what their old fathers did when gazing up the eternal sky, and feeling the presence of a Being as far as far and as near as near can be : they can but combine the selfsame words, and utter once more the primeval Aryan prayer, Heaven-Father, in that form which will endure for ever, ‘Our Father which art in heaven.’”*

What a glorious change would be produced if India were to return to the worship of the one true God, our great Heaven-Father ! Nothing else will be effectual ; other reforms would follow in its train.

Hear the words of one of India’s “Great Men.” The late Keshub Chander Sen said at Bombay in 1868 :—

“What is the programme of reforms you think, I intend to lay before you this evening ? Not half measures, like the education of this section of the community or the reformation of that particular social evil. These cannot—it is my most firm conviction—these cannot lift India as a nation from the mire of idolatry, of moral and social corruption. If you wish to regenerate this country, make religion the basis of all your reform movements. Were I engaged in the work of reforming this country, I would not be busy in lopping off the branches, but I would strike the axe at the fatal root of the tree of corruption, namely—idolatry. Ninety-nine evils out of every hundred in Hindu society are, in my opinion, attributable to idolatry and superstition.

“Hindu society has a very peculiar structure. Here in India we do not see religion on one side, society on the other ; but religion and society are interwoven with each other. It has been justly said that the Hindus walk and sit religiously, eat and drink religiously, work and sleep religiously ;—their social organism is interwoven with their religion. If therefore you wish to reform the social organism of India, you must, in the first instance, give her true religion or else your attempts will be ineffectual. Give her life—give her capacity to think about her spiritual interests—and then you will find social reformation will spontaneously—in the natural cause of things—come about in the fulness of time.”

* *Science of Religion*, pp. 172, 173.

Rao Bahadur M. G. Ranade, in a letter to Mr. B. M. Malabari, expresses similar sentiments :—

“Our deliberate conviction, however, has grown upon us with every effort, that it is only a religious revival that can furnish sufficient moral strength to work out the complex social problems which demand our attention. Mere considerations of expediency or economical calculations of gains or losses can never nerve a community to undertake and carry through social reforms, especially with a community like ours, so spell-bound by custom and authority. Our people feel and feel earnestly, that some of our social customs are fraught with evil, but as this evil is of a temporal character, they think that it does not justify a breach of commands divine, for such breach involves a higher penalty. The truth is, that orthodox society has lost its power of life, it can initiate no reform, nor sympathise with it. Only a religious revival, a revival not of forms, but of sincere earnestness which constitutes true religion, can effect the desired end.”

Divine help is especially needed on the part of the leaders in India's reformation.

Prayer for it may be fitly prefaced by a sorrowful acknowledgment of the past. Most persons, it is true, think lightly of their moral conduct ; but the thoughtful man “has sad and remorseful experiences, the sense of unfulfilled duties, of wasted hours, of mean and unmanly sins against conscience and heart, against God and man.” The humble confession should be made, “Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.”

Every person who sincerely tries to act up fully to the light of conscience will soon find how sin clings to him and gains the victory over him. In every religion except Christianity man bears the consequences of his own misdeeds, and is rewarded on account of his own supposed merits. Christianity teaches that the punishment due to our sins is greater than we can bear, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Hence, God, in His great love, has provided a Saviour. Space does not permit further explanation here; but the reader is directed to *Short Papers for Seekers after Truth* for a brief account of the doctrines of Christianity.

In any case, the prayer may be offered for light to know God's will and strength to do it.

Motives.—Foster mentions a “noble motive” as one of the means of attaining decision of character. India, your “Fatherland,” presents one of the loftiest order. It contains more than one-sixth of the human race. Its inhabitants are bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, toiling, struggling, fainting like yourself in the battle of life. What a glorious work it is to take part in their emancipation from the bondage of ignorance, idolatry, and every form of evil under which they suffer ! How degrading it is for a man to

have no higher aim in life than to enrich or raise in the world himself and his family !

If you have no regard for others, think of the eternity into which you are speeding, and into which you may be launched at any moment. You may "shine at the stars for ever and ever," or your portion may be "shame and everlasting contempt." One or other must be your lot. Which will you choose ? Follow the counsel given in the spirited verses below :—

- • Courage, brother, do not stumble,
 Though thy path be dark as night ;
 There's a star to guide the humble :—
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

- Let the road be rough and dreary,
 And its end far out of sight,
 Foot it bravely ! strong or weary,
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

- Perish "policy" and cunning !
 Perish all that fears the light !
 Whether losing, whether winning,
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

- Trust no lovely forms of passion :
 Fiends may look like angels bright ;
 Trust no custom, "school," or fashion—
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

- Simple rule and safest guiding,
 Inward peace and inward might,
 Star upon our path abiding—
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

- Some will hate thee, some will love thee ;
 Some will flatter, some will slight ;
 Cease from man, and look above thee—
 "Trust in God, and do the right !"

And let there be no delay. Join at once the noble band already in the field.

Arise ! for the day is passing,
 And you lie dreaming on ;
 Your brothers are cased in armour,
 And forth to the fight are gone !
 A place in the ranks awaits you ;
 Each man has some part to play ;
 The Past and the Future are nothing
 In the face of stern To-day.

Arise from the dreams of the Future
Of gaining some hard-fought field,
Of storming some airy fortress,
Or bidding some giant yield ;
Your future has deeds of glory,
Of honour, (God grant it may !)
But your arm will be never stronger,
Or needed as *now*—To-day.

Arise ! if the Past detain you,
Her sunshines and storms forget ;
No chains so unworthy to hold you ;
As those of a vain regret ;
Sad or bright, she is lifeless ever ;
Cast her phantom arms away,
Nor look back, save to learn the lesson
Of a nobler strife To-day.

Arise ! for the day is passing !
The sound that you scarcely hear,
Is the enemy marching to battle !
Rise ! Rise ! for the foe is near !
Stay not to sharpen your weapons,
Or the hour will strike at last,
When, from dreams of a coming battle,
You may wake to find it past.

